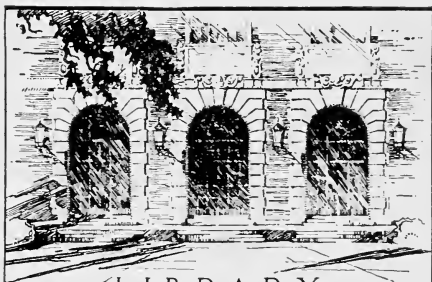




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A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED:

BEING A SEQUEL

TO "THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD."

BY

GILLAN VASE.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL III.

London:

REMINGTON AND CO.,

5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1878.

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A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH HELENA MAKES A NEW FRIEND.

MR. TARTAR, broken-hearted as he weened—though a brave young heart is usually tougher than its owner thinks for—had returned to his bachelor's chambers in London, to brood over his hard fate, and to write long epistles of inquiry to the Revd. Septimus concerning his lost love, as the only employment left to him in life.

If he could have heard of a leaky ship in Her Majesty's service (though, of course, no such thing is to be found there), he would have volunteered for that ship, glad to think that if she foundered, which she probably would, there was absolute certainty that his heavy heart would carry him to the bottom of the ocean and keep him there.

But the love of life in a young lieutenant, not yet eight-and-twenty, and rich and handsome withal, is like a hydra with many heads, it lifts up others when it has lost one, and has

recovered from the first terrible shock of that loss. The flowers he had raised in his garden on the tiles were only dying, not dead, when he noticed them once more, and pointed them out to Lobley as miniature emblems of himself. And the next day, by some unknown agency, they were perking up their disconsolate heads, to look out for the sunshine again.

“But for all that,” said Lobley to his chief crony, a landsman who was half a seaman, for he had a son upon the “rowing deep,” and roaring on the deep, under the infliction of a rope’s end, oftener than the father dreamed of, “for all that, it’s squally weather with the Capting (Lobley, in conversation with others, invariably raised his young master to that rank, Lieutenant being too insignificant for “us”). The Capting was a sailing along with the fairest of breezes and the finest of weathers, when up spring as dirty a squall as ever I see, and its capsized the Capting,” and Lobley disconsolately raised to his lips a mug without a handle, and drained it of its contents to the bottom.

“He’s in love,” said his companion, a red-faced, corpulent man with a husky voice, “that’s what’s the matter with him.”

“Don’t go for to tell me!” said Lobley.

“That’s what’s the matter with him,” repeated the corpulent man. “I was in love myself once, with my Bob, his mother, and I was that desperate that people was afraid to come near me. If you’d a come near me at that time, I’d have knocked you into the middle of next week, rayther than not.”

“How did you get cured?” inquired Lobley, anxious to adopt the remedy for his suffering master.

“It all went to my head, and the doctor came and bled me, and then I married her, and I was quite cured before my Bob was born. I’d thrash her now as soon as look at her, as all the neighbours knows.”

Lobley could hardly sleep that night for thinking of his master, and wondering if he should be able to induce him to try the cure. First he must be bled, thought Lobley, then married, then, to prove that he is well again, must thrash her afterwards.

Mr. Grewgious and Mr. Neville had taken up their abode at the “Crozier,” where they received daily bulletins, by favour of the Revd. Septimus, being themselves strongly prohibited from making their appearance in Minor Canon Corner. This strict prohibition would have been scouted by the Collector of Rents if it had not been for Neville’s sake.

For the lad's health was so completely shattered that it would have been most culpable to expose him to the risk of infection.

It was touching to see how submissively Neville submitted to this decree from the conscientious Minor Canon, hard though the separation from his sister was, and cruelly as his heart was torn with anxiety for Rosa. But the very nature of the young man seemed to have changed during his absence from Cloisterham, and a word or look from his dearly loved and honoured friend, the Revd. Septimus, was sufficient to check the faintest sign of passion. In the fiery furnace of affliction, the dross, encrusting his naturally noble heart, had melted away, and left behind only pure gold. He was patient and gentle, considerate towards the faults and peculiarities of others, and assiduous and constant in the endeavour to subdue and conquer his own. He kept kind-hearted Mr. Grewgious in a chronic state of cold in the head during their residence at the Crozier, and rendered the item "pockethandkerchiefs" in that gentleman's washing-bill, a most important item for the washerwoman.

Even the waiter, who had at first expressed his indignation (in confidence) upon being called upon to stand behind the chair

of a party which had been as near dangling as a party well could be, and which might come to be nearer—even he was ready to swear at the end of a week, that the poor young man was as innocent as he himself of the crime imputed to him; and was ready also (or said he was to his *confidante*, the chambermaid) to knock off the head of any individual differing with him in this respect (he said, “individgeal,” but the meaning was the same; and the intention, to attest his kind feelings towards the invalid).

And not only the heart of the waiter, but, in still greater measure, the heart of the Collector of Rents, had Neville contrived to win during their stay together in that dull and do-nothing, or rather, nothing-to-do hotel. If any phrenologist had taken the trouble to examine the cranium of Mr. Grewgious, rugged in outline and decidedly unæsthetical in form, he would have found it, nevertheless, unusually developed and bumpy in the region where natural affections, or domestic qualities (or whatever the name of them may be) are supposed to hold their domicile. Yet Providence, who had supplied him so liberally with these qualities, had cast him also into a position in life, and given him surroundings incompatible with the free exercise of them,

and he had hardly known upon whom to bestow them, or even who would do him the favour of putting up with them.

In the solitude of Staple Inn, and in the society of Bazzard who, though an undoubted genius and a "Unity," was not exactly the sort of person upon whom to bestow such gifts, they had run to waste, or, rather, rusted somewhat, for want of an object.

There was, to be sure, his pretty ward—how tenderly and reverently loved for her own sweet sake, and for the sake of her dead mother, dearer still, his stammering lips would never be able to explain.

There was his industrious clerk, for whom—though a mystery ever, and as such, not altogether satisfactory—he felt a sincere and ever-increasing attachment.

There were Mr. Chrisparkle and his warm-hearted and impetuous little mother, whom he admired and respected with a warmth and earnestness too great for words.

There was Mr. Tartar whom, as a brave and gallant young fellow, he was proud to know—but there was any amount of affection still within him (you might draw on that bank to unlimited extent, and be sure that it would never refuse payment), and out of this boundless store he began to endow, largely,

the pale young man who was his constant companion during this time of bitter sorrow ; when the life of her he loved above all hung trembling in the balance.

In other words, he began to love the lad, as he might have loved a son of his own, if it had pleased God to give him one ; and he would listen with streaming eyes (his cold troubled him fearfully at this epoch, and he was in a continual condition of sniff) to the lad's simple narrative of the miserable life he and his sister had spent during their childhood, under the tyranny and oppression of a heartless and relentless man ; and his fist would clench, as Neville's had previously done—but now no more—when they came upon this topic.

He would listen with quivering lips (it was a habit of his, and meant nothing, he explained) to the boy's agitated account of his love for Rosa, and the sad, sad consequences to which it had led ; yet felt inexpressibly relieved somehow when Neville added—

“ But that is all over, sir. I shall love her always—always ; yet I pray to God every night and morning to raise her up from her sick bed, and let her be happy with another, far more deserving ; for my love is hopeless, and I am contented that it should be so now.”

Then the old man, to comfort him, would tell his story, too, and they would weep together, openly and unreservedly, in total forgetfulness of the chronic cold in the head, and the part it had to play.

Or, at other times, they would walk together in the Cathedral Close; the old man supporting the feeble steps of the young one; the fresh air cheering both, and filling them with renewed hope for the little creature so dear to them. Or they would stroll into the neighbourhood of Minor Canon Corner, looking up wistfully to the window of the room in which she lay—ah! all unconscious of the love so bountifully bestowed upon her!—happy if Helena looked out for a moment, with a tender smile of love for her brother, and a hopeful smile of encouragement for both. Or they would attend the service in the Cathedral, where, absorbed in one subject, and filled with one longing, they would imagine that the whole congregation were putting up an impassioned prayer to God to save their darling, or praising Him for having done so, in strains of heavenly harmony.

Meanwhile, the china shepherdess and Helena, ever faithful and untired at their post, watched by the sick bed, and listened to

the quick breathing, and incoherent babblings which issued from the innocent lips, cracked and swollen with the fever.

“Eddy, Eddy!” the first words and the last; uttered, sometimes tenderly, sometimes reproachfully, sometimes in wild accents, that made the listeners’ blood run cold. The sick girl never referred to the last fatal scene, though she occasionally mentioned the murderer’s name; yet only in connection with his nephew, and as a warning to Eddy.

She would inquire in the dead of night, when the lamp burned low, and the patient nurses’ physical strength waxed faintest, with that look, terrible to see, expressive of no consciousness of things as they are, but reflecting a world of its own fevered imagination—“if he cannot understand the danger he is in? if (in a whisper) he cannot see that his uncle is a rival, and a dangerous one?” Then she would beg him to believe, with pitiful earnestness, that in withdrawing from her engagement, and inducing him to do the same, she had only been actuated by the certainty that he did not truly love her, and that a marriage without love would be a mockery, and a source of misery to both; then she would implore him, in piteous, heartrending tones, to go away, and not look at her so

reproachfully, for that she cannot—cannot bear it; then she would tell him (in a weak whisper again) to come and kiss and forgive her before she dies, for that, she loves him—loves him always. And then she would wander away into a maze of confused thought and feeling, given utterance to in broken words, and which the troubled listeners cannot follow.

Thus day followed day, and night, night, until the time came when the doctor and Helena, the mother and her son, stood solemnly round the couch, awaiting breathlessly the result of the most dreaded moment in the malady; the moment which would decide the question, whether death or life—the crisis.

The fever had burnt itself out at last, and the little creature, who had been torn and rent by this unclean spirit, had stretched out her weary limbs and fallen into a sleep so profound and deep that they hardly dared to hope that she could ever wake again.

Once more the doctor took the little hand—ah, so worn and wasted!—once more, he laid his own upon the faintly beating heart—once more, he uttered the only words of hope which would have been true: “She is not dead—yet.”

And she did not die. The patient, tender nurses were rewarded a hundred-fold for their love and care. The fragile plant, from whose heart the cruel worm was taken away, though presenting hardly any outward sign of life, had a little green spot at its centre still, and they nourished it so carefully that it began to grow again.

A life so frail and feeble, that a breath would have quenched it, but no baleful breath was suffered to blow upon it, and the flickering light of life burned up afresh. Again she came back from the verge of the grave, opened her eyes, and smiled upon them. Thanks be to God, ever merciful ! She knew them now.

Oh, how joyful were the hearts in Minor Canon Corner ! and how joyful and thankful were Mr. Grewgious and Neville, in their seclusion at the Crozier !

Mr. Tartar, on receiving the good news from the Revd. Septimus who hastened to relieve his friend's anxiety, fell first into a transport of delight, and then into a transport of despair—stricken with a sort of moral ague, and filling the anxious mind of Lobley, who considered these paroxysms as still more alarming than the former state of “downness in the mouth,” with such unmitigated concern that that faithful blue-jacket was driven

to consult with his red-faced friend on the expediency of having that process of bleeding—to which Mr. Tartar objected—carried out by physical force; and was only deterred from doing this by a fear, which his friend shared, that the law might be “agin” him.

The old man, and the young one, always tenderly supported by his fatherly friend, walked now more frequently than ever in the neighbourhood of Minor Canon Corner, and, making long halts before the Minor Canon’s house, look up with glad, beaming eyes to the window, where, in course of time, not only Helena’s, but also Rosa’s small face, look down upon them smilingly.

In an easy chair, nestling in pillows and covered up from draught, or suspicion of draught; in a little white cap—for all her beautiful hair was gone—how strange and changed she seemed to them; how pale and sunken the once round and rosy cheek; and only the dark eyes and the old winning smile, all her own, remained still by which to recognise her. Even as they gaze, full of happiness, the small face vanishes, hidden by the starting tears which rise in their own eyes, and they turn away, that she may not be grieved at the sight, and walk back again in thankfulness, too intense for words.

About this time a little scene took place between Helena and the doctor, after which they became, instead of enemies, the very best of friends, and which afforded Helena much real pleasure. Did she hope that this favourable opinion of the doctor would arouse an echo in the breast of the china shepherdess?

Did certain hopes, crushed down with a strong will, refuse to die, and begin timidly to raise their heads again? Who can interpret the shy, half-conscious, half-unacknowledged thoughts and dreams of a girl's innocent and loving heart? Who may analyse her blushes?

Helena was sitting, one day, beside Rosa's couch, and watching the calm, health-restoring sleep of convalescence—dreaming, also, perhaps, fond dreams of her own, when the doctor entered.

She rose quickly, with a finger on her lips, and stood quietly beside him as he gently felt the pulse of the sleeping girl and smiled satisfied at the regularity of her breathing, and the cool moisture of her brow. Then, without removing his position, he raised his eyes from the pale, calm face upon the pillow, and let them rest upon the dark, handsome one of the girl beside him, flushing under his scrutiny.

She stood before him, with her usual proud composed bearing, her head slightly thrown back but her eyelids drooping, for she did not care to meet the cold, yet provoked look with which it had been his habit to regard her, ever since that occasion when she had ventured—and successfully—to set his commands at naught.

She was waiting for his directions concerning the patient, and as they did not immediately follow, she lifted her dark lashes at last, amazed.

But she was more amazed still, as she met the look with which he was regarding her, and the brilliant colour, already dyeing her dusky cheek, deepened as she returned it.

He was thinking—the old doctor—always rather a connoisseur in the matter of female beauty—that no sculptor could chisel features more pure and noble than those upon which he was gazing; no painter produce an effect of colouring at once so bright and perfect.

He was thinking also, that he had been harsh and unjust to this girl; prejudged and misunderstood her noble nature, animated by a quiet heroism, which never vaunted itself, and was resigned to be disregarded; that he had allowed himself to be tainted with the

general prejudice in Cloisterham against the name of Landless, and that this unjust prejudice had been strengthened through her opposition, which he had chosen to regard as purest obstinacy.

“Miss Helena,” he began, hesitatingly (it was the first time he had ever addressed her by her name, or any name) I—I believe your name *is* Helena.”

“My name,” she said, with the slightest possible curl of her beautifully formed lips, half wonder, half disdain, “is Helena Landless.”

“Ah-h!” ejaculated the doctor, “another slap in the face for the presumptuous old man, and smartly given, too, (indeed the ruddy colour had rushed into his bronzed cheek almost as rapidly as it might have done under the operation); you wish to point out to me the impropriety of my addressing you by any name, with the least approach to familiarity. I understand, and I will obey, young lady, for (with a wry face, and a tap on the still reddened cheek) you know how to punish, Miss Landless.”

If he were regarding the proud face and the brilliant eyes, composedly meeting, but not inviting his scrutiny, in hopes of her relenting, he was regarding them in vain.

“I want to beg you,” he resumed, after a pause—“Heaven forbid that I should venture to command you any more!—not as a friend, for I have no claim on earth to consider myself in that light, and if I should presume to do so, you (grimly) would soon put me right, Miss Landless—but professionally, simply professionally, to go out a little every day into the fresh air, now that our sweet little patient is getting on so famously. You have no right to wear yourself out unnecessarily, for the sake of your kind friends, the Revd. Mr. Chrisparkle and his mother, who have had more than enough anxiety and alarm.”

“I should gladly follow your advice,” she replied, “even if I had not already done so, on my own account. I went yesterday to see my brother, and I shall walk every day in future when the weather permits. Not that there is any absolute necessity for my doing so, for I am perfectly well.” Then, dismissing herself from the conversation with an expressive inclination of her head, she inquired, “Have you no instructions, doctor, concerning the invalid?”

“I may safely leave her now with you and nature, Miss Landless, two of the most excellent of nurses, and whose united efforts have worked wonders beyond my skill,”

said the doctor, with a low bow ; partly, a spontaneous mark of reverence towards her grace and beauty, and partly to hide the mortification inspired within him by her cool words, and the steady determination she showed, as he thought, to drive him back into the sphere to which his own harsh and unkind treatment of her had condemned him. He little knew that the hard life of the poor girl had compelled her to wear this armour and to wield these sharp weapons for her own defence. He turned upon his heel, therefore, hurt and mortified beyond measure.

But, at the door, with his hand upon the handle, some feeling compelled him to turn round again, and steal one last look at the resolute face, so wondrously beautiful, and yet so cold and hard, and which attracted him, in spite of himself, as a magnet attracts iron.

Rosa was still sleeping, calmly and sweetly as an infant, her mouth slightly opened, leaving an aperture through which her pearly teeth gleamed, while over her pale face a rosy flush seemed to hover, as if intending to settle there permanently by-and-by ; and standing beside her, looking down upon her friend with a look of earnest love and tenderness, was Helena.

This gentle look of love so softened the proud face, making it so womanly and sweet, that the doctor's heart melted.

"Miss Landless," he said, softly, beckoning to her. She came towards him with a noiseless step, imagining that he had forgotten something.

"You treat me so coldly and cruelly, Miss Landless," he said, "that I was going away in anger, and without saying what I meant to say; but you shall not triumph so far as that. I owe it to myself as a just man, and I will say it, whether you care to hear it or not."

She stood, surprised, and half-alarmed, waiting for it.

"I want to tell you, that, influenced by a cruel prejudice, I have been suspicious of you, and unjust towards you, and that I know that you're a good and noble girl, and I am sorry to have wronged you. There now!"

Her quiet look, for a moment somewhat troubled, seemed to say that she was accustomed to be looked upon with suspicion and injustice, and that, though it had still a sting to wound her, she had learned to bear it.

"I want to tell you, that I have watched you, day by day, in this sick room, doing your difficult duty—duty which I urged you

to shirk, more shame for me ! bravely and lovingly ; indifferent to undeserved blame, and equally indifferent to praise or admiration, and that I reverence and admire you, more (and it is no infidelity to my dear little wife at home, who has grown old with me, to say so) than I ever did any woman before. There now ! ”

A half-amused smile disturbed the gravity of her mouth and a look of pleased satisfaction darted out of her dark eyes, but she still remained silent. It is comparatively easy to bear unjust blame and censure, but who can quite resist candid and honest admiration and love ?

“ And I want to tell you, that there are very few young ladies, endowed with your wonderful personal charms—don’t shake your head and blush, Miss Landless, I am only an old man, and you needn’t mind confessing to me, that you know that you are beautiful—who would have run the risk of losing them in this sick room, pregnant with fever which at any moment might have turned to infection, (I didn’t choose to tell you how much I feared typhus, of which I have one or two cases at the present moment) and you have not even thought of the danger you were in, nay, I believe you would have been glad,

rather, to make the sacrifice ; I see it in your flashing eyes. And I shall make a point," he went on, after a pause, " of praising you wherever I go, and declaring that I consider it impossible that a brother of yours—a twin brother—could be guilty of a cowardly action, or a mean one ; it is not in the blood, Miss Landless. This shall be my second act of reparation ; my first is : to beg you most earnestly and heartily to forgive me. There now ! ”

The effort of uttering these last two words with tremendous emphasis, and yet to maintain the subdued tone in which they had both been speaking on account of the sleeper, crimsoned the doctor's face again, until even his head gleamed rosy through his white hair. He now held out both hands beseechingly, and Helena could not choose but take them, laughing a soft musical laugh, as she did so.

But even as she laughed, the joyful tears (a most rare outlet for emotion with her) sprang to her dark eyes. For her brother's sake ! For the sake of her poor, persecuted, patient Neville ! If she had won a friend for him, then she had won something greatly worth the winning.

“ Don't praise me, doctor,” she said smiling, as soon as she felt her voice under control,

and she could smile without faltering, "for praised people are never liked, you know, and always have to live up to the praising, which is a hard task always; but if you will help to wash white my poor Neville's name, then I will be thankful to you always; it is so hard for him to bear, poor boy!"

"And you forgive me, Miss Landless. I never wanted any one to forgive me so much before; do, do, you can't imagine how much store I lay upon it, for I don't understand it myself."

"How can I have anything to forgive, doctor. You were quite right, from your point of view. You had heard bad things of us. You fancied me an obstinate, wayward, useless girl, at the best, who would be in your way, and everybody's way; who would probably even retard the recovery of the patient, didn't you?"

"If I am obliged to confess that I did," said the doctor, penitently, "I do so now with shame and with contrition."

"And you even went so far, doctor," continued Helena, mischievously, almost laughing outright at the comical expression of distress in his face, "of wishing for this once (though heaven forbid, for any other time or period!) you could occupy a position of lawful authority

towards this wilful girl, be—just long enough to punish her—her father or guardian, and try whether solitary confinement, combined with a regimen of bread and water, would not curb her haughty spirit, and reduce her to subordination.”

“ Oh, Miss Landless ! Miss Landless ! You are a terribly hard one to deal with ! Will it not satisfy you, when I aver, that although compelled by truth to acknowledge that some such thoughts did enter my mind, I do so now with a feeling akin to remorse.”

But meeting a roguish twinkle in the bright eyes of his tormentor, the doctor laughed, and Helena joined in the chorus, softly though, not to disturb the sleeper. But Rosa's repose was so profound, that there was little danger of that.

“ It would not have answered, doctor,” continued Helena, “ that may be your consolation. It has been tried many a time, and worse than that, but I fear it only made me more haughty and obstinate.”

“ I don't doubt it,” said the doctor. “ I shall be very careful about taking up arms against you again, for I know who would be beaten. And now that we are good friends, as I trust we are, Miss Helena (do permit me, as a token of forgiveness?) I will only

make one final remark before going away to my duty. When you honour a man with this graceful hand (looking down at it, admiringly, as he still held it in his) and take him as your husband, he will be a happy man, a very happy man, if he knows how to manage you, —but heaven help him if he doesn't."

And, leaving behind him this retort, as a final backhander, and as some compensation for the smart he had suffered, the doctor, triumphant, trotted away, as fast as his legs would carry his somewhat corpulent body. He feared, possibly, that tarriance might bring a renewal of hostilities, and certainly a renewal of defeat.

Was it anger which suffused Helena's cheek with a burning blush, and caused her, even there where no one could see it, to cover her face with her hand ; or was it some other feeling more womanly, and therefore shyer ? Who can tell ?

CHAPTER II.

A GOOD MAN AND A BAD ONE.

As "it never rains but it pours," to speak with an old proverb, so, drowsy Cloisterham, once roused out of its long slumbering and dormant state, by exciting and overwhelming news, was not suffered to sink into repose again.

It had dozed off once more, it is true, after its recovery from the first rude shock, viz. : the disappearance under such suspicious circumstances of Mr. Edwin Drood, and the incessant search of the bereaved uncle after the murderer; but its quiet was not of long duration.

It was roused again, and kept effectually awake, by the restless ghost of Mrs. Sapsea, which, finding no rest apparently for itself, maliciously prevented others from doing so; by the mysterious and unaccountable void in that tenement where, in the nature of things, her body ought to have been lying; by the magical ring in the coffin, which nobody would own to, and which seemed to have come into existence like a myth, or a fairy tale; by the complete and utter downfall of

the head of the community, biting the dust (figuratively) and hiding itself much diminished (literally) in the pillows of a huge four-post bedstead—(a tremendous bargain at an auction, and hung with sombre velvet curtains, a tremendous bargain at another. A tremendous bed altogether for size, gloom, and cheapness, and eminently calculated, as Mr. Grewgious might have said, to carry on a most successful attack upon the liver, and raise any quantity of bile, whatever—a theory to the truth of which Mrs. Sapsea, probably, could have testified); by the rise in life and immense popularity of Deputy; and lastly, by the attack on Miss Bud, the attempted abduction, and the final catastrophe in the river.

And as if this wasn't enough to keep the most constitutionally drowsy city alive and kicking during the remaining term of its existence, another stunner was brought to bear upon it (stunners being naturally enlivening) and it was this: The man who had attacked Rosa and nearly carried her off; whom Mr. Chrisparkle had pushed into the river to prevent still more fatal consequences; who had been rescued by a mysterious stranger, coming and going like a messenger from heaven, or like a genii out of the Arabian Nights;

who had been recovered from drowning and brought back to life (to quit it again in a still more interesting manner, and in presence of a larger and more appreciative public) by the superhuman efforts of an indefatigable officer of the law—this criminal was no other than John Jasper himself, beardless, and hardly recognisable; who had not only been highly respected by an indiscriminating public—which was of comparatively small account—but also by a right reverend and honourable and discriminating Dean and Chapter.

And as if this wasn't enough, that same John Jasper was lying chained in Cloisterham gaol awaiting his trial there; and awaiting it, not only for the attack on Miss Bud—itsself a hanging matter—but also for the murder of his lost nephew, Mr. Edwin Drood.

That Cloisterham to a man—and woman, too—should draw its breath in convulsive gasps, upon hearing this last, and still further exhibit every appearance of strangulation, will be a subject of no surprise to a reflective mind. You may have too much of a good thing, whether beer, cakes, or scandal; and Cloisterham, sick of stomach, and dizzy of head, felt that it had had a surfeit.

Thus it came to pass that the secret, with which Mr. Grewgious had been so highly charged on his arrival in Cloisterham on the afternoon when the terrible crime had been committed, had evaporated somehow and discharged itself, without his agency and even without his knowledge. He had forgotten all about it during those days of bitter sorrow and grief, when the child of his affection had been rending herself in that awful struggle with death; and during those happy days of joy and thankfulness which followed. But his darling was rapidly getting strong and well again now; he had had her in his arms that very day; had mingled his happy tears with hers; and felt her soft kisses on his wrinkled cheek. O, Heaven! and he had murmured against the decrees of Providence; had repined against his lonely fate; and instead of punishing and still further abasing him, God had opened His hand wide and given him a child, a daughter, loving and beautiful as an angel, and not only his by firmest bonds of love, but *her* own flesh and blood.

As he retraced his steps towards his hotel, it seemed as if his heart, so full of purest love to God and man, opened wider still and took in all creation. He hastened across the road

to expostulate with a man beating a half-starved donkey, and as his words were dictated by love—not only towards the poor beast, but towards the master, more worthy of pity still—for it is a thousand times better to suffer than to inflict suffering—they did not fall upon barren ground.

If poor Dobbin—poor step-child of nature—got fewer stripes on his aching back that day than usual, and a better feed in his stable at the end of it, Mr. Grewgious was the good genius who had procured him these benefits. Happy Mr. Grewgious ! for a good deed, however small, is a drop of oil in the lamp which lights the road to Heaven.

The good man got back to the hotel at last, though his many missions of peace and goodwill (for the donkey was not the only one he benefited) somewhat retarded his progress. But as he entered the door of the Crozier, a shadow fell across his path, until then radiant with sunshine, and a great weight slowly settled on his heart.

It was the remembrance of his secret which, like a thunder-bolt out of a summer sky, fell upon him when least expected, and least wished-for. Probably he had heard the name of John Jasper uttered as he passed the bar.

For his secret was closely connected with John Jasper; and not only closely connected, but inseparable from him. His secret *was* John Jasper, shown up to the world in his true colours, with the garb of virtue, covering up the wolf within, torn away for ever.

And his was the hand appointed to do this work, as he had believed, or was it only self-appointed?—his hand, as yet pure and free from stain, but certain to be sullied in the execution of this dirty work.

With a troubled mind and a heavy heart (how could he ever have rejoiced and gloried in it?), he took down this unholy secret from the shelf where he had laid it; contemplating it with a strange repugnance, not only towards the secret, but towards himself.

Heaven knows how rusty and musty, how cobwebby and dusty, it might have grown up there, if Mr. Grewgious' conscience had but made common cause with his wishes, and allowed him to restore it to the shelf. But his was a sturdy conscience and a stiff-necked, and, moreover, accustomed to be listened to, and it now refused to be silenced.

It was still thundering within him, as he sat there reflective, with his troubled and puzzled head resting on his hand, when the Minor Canon entered; to whom, knowing

and recognising a kindred spirit, the unruly conscience consented to refer the matter.

The Revd. Septimus listened with grave attention, but without any manifestation of surprise; and, when the old man ended, half-ashamed and half-remorseful, almost feeling in such honourable company as if his secret were, after all, only a species of revenge, he informed him that it was one no longer.

A secret! Why the whole town rang with it, raising echoes so constant and vibrating that it was next door to a miracle that Mr. Grewgious should not have heard this ever-resounding peal.

A secret! Why, at that very moment, in the bar, the landlord and the boots, the landlady and the chambermaid, the choleric waiter and every single individual that the dull little hotel could boast of (and some that it couldn't boast of, if shame were not a stranger to its bosom) were discussing it with ever-increasing interest.

Simple-minded Mr. Grewgious, absorbed in love and grief, and deaf to all else, had been fancying that the world had been standing still with him, and now learned, to his amaze, that the man he had been hunting for months past, with more or less success, had been fairly brought down at last, and was lying safe and sure in Cloisterham gaol.

But the news did not seem quite so satisfactory to Mr. Grewgious, as perhaps, Mr. Chrisparkle had imagined they would. Something like shame bowed the old man's head, and no amount of smoothing could smooth away the rugged doubts which worried him.

The feeling of excitement during the chase is a different thing to the delivering up of the victim to the slaughterers, and for the moment it was no comfort to Mr. Grewgious to feel that he had brought down a beast of prey.

But the remembrance of Neville and the recollection that only by the discovery of the true murderer, could the poor lad be righted, cheered him up somewhat. After all, what was he, and of what consideration were his feelings?

Ah, who may laugh at scruples such as these, impracticable though they be? Is it strange if a good man feels almost sullied, on having become, especially of his own choosing, the rod to lacerate the sinner? Is it strange that he suffers, on having been the agent in delivering up to punishment even one who has richly merited his fate?

No doubt it is absurd and sentimental, and deserves the sneer curling your fine lips, sir and madam. You are perfectly right. What would the world come to, if such nonsense

should again root and ground? What would the world come to if not only the guilty, but also the innocent, were to be spared suffering, necessary for our safety and enjoyment?

Vivat Hangman! *Vivat* Butcher! *Vivat* Conqueror! Long life and happiness! for what should we do without you? But do not be too hard on foolish Mr. Grewgious. He would only prefer, as you do, too, most likely, to be the goblet (no matter whether earthen or golden) filled to the brim with vintage from the vineyard of God; not the broom—a useful and indispensable instrument, nevertheless—which sweeps away the filth and refuse of our cities.

“I have sent Neville and his sister out to walk together,” continued the Minor Canon. “She is the right one to be the first to bring him the good news, for I fancy he is to the full as ignorant of them as you were. I am concerned for the lad, he looks so frail and delicate. But I hope—I feel sure—that he will rally now.”

But at this Mr. Grewgious shook his head sorrowfully.

“And I wanted to ask you,” went on the Revd. Sept, “if you should happen to have heard anything further of the noble stranger

who saved the two. It was most culpably negligent; but, during that time of intense anxiety, we neglected to make enquiries concerning his whereabouts, and when we did, it was too late. He was gone, no one knew whither; and indeed, nobody seemed to know, or to have heard, anything about him."

Mr. Grewgious had only heard from his clerk, who had written to inform him of his return to London, and to his duty; and who had begged his master to feel no anxiety concerning any business on hand, for that he would attend to it faithfully. And Mr. Grewgious felt sure that he would. But of the mysterious stranger he knew nothing. With a feeling of shame for his ingratitude, and speedy forgetfulness of one who had saved a life far more precious to him than his own, he was obliged to confess that he also knew nothing.

"Strange," mused the Minor Canon, "strange and unaccountable." Almost as if he had been sent by God in answer to that fervent prayer, and recalled by God when that mission was accomplished. Well, wherever he was, God's richest blessings go with him! Wherever he was, God reward him a hundred-fold, what he had done for them!

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The prisoner, John Jasper, had sent a message to the Revd. Septimus, requesting him to visit him in the prison, and, of course, that good and Christian gentleman hastened to comply with the demand.

Aye, even though the china shepherdess, viewing the project in the light of her own fears, and receiving, therefore, a distorted impression thereof, was fully persuaded that the whole thing only meant a cruel attack upon her Sept, and strenuously opposed it. Aye, even though she joined entreaty to command, and implored him, by her own claims upon him; for the sake of the beautiful girl he loved, and hoped to win; for the sake of Cloisterham, who would miss its favourite clergyman; for the sake of the world, which could not afford to lose the best of men—not to put himself in the power of the murderer.

Aye, even though she still further strengthened these adjurations with a burst of tears, and the clasp of her two white plump arms about his neck, as if she would hold him back by physical force.

Even against all these means brought to bear upon him, he kept his ground manfully. The little mother had to learn again, what she had had to learn before, that another power

had more weight with her son than even she, absolute as she believed herself. With Right on the one side, and the loving mother on the other, the Minor Canon was cruelly torn and wrenched, but never undecided.

It was his duty, he said, and there must be an end of it; and though very rebellious at heart, the china shepherdess was forced to yield.

But it made no sort of impression on her, when her son pointed out gently the folly of her fears, and tried to show her (a difficult task, for her wayward eyes persisted in looking in an opposite direction) that they were purely imaginary; and that even if the prisoner had summoned him with evil intent, he would be deprived of the power of executing his designs.

When an illogical idea has once got possession of a woman, no amount of common sense is sufficient to dislodge it. Fully convinced in her own mind, that a dreadful danger was suspended over the head of her boy, the old lady, with flushed cheeks, reddened eyelids, vibrating cap, and air, compounded of a rebellious martyr and unheeded Solomon, prepared, as a last labour of love, a "support" for her deluded son, of such dimensions that ten Septs might have had

enough and to spare, and insisted on his partaking of the whole of it ; sitting down beside him to make sure that, in this respect at least, she was obeyed.

It was in vain that her son pleaded that he had dined with hearty appetite an hour before, and really had no room for it ; that he was not going out as a juryman in a doubtful case, and was, therefore, under no necessity to take in provision for a week ; and that (jokingly) if her own gloomy predictions should be verified, it would be a pure waste of material.

This final remark only made her more earnest in her entreaties not to refuse her this last satisfaction ; although, she added, their separation would not last for long ; for if the murderer should succeed in his villainous design, it would be a double murder again, and her gray hairs (a figure of speech, for she hadn't one) would speedily descend after him in sorrow to the grave. And she poured him out a bumper with a resolute hand.

He was obliged to make a pretence of eating and drinking to satisfy her ; then clasped her in his arms with a pleasant laugh of encouragement ; told her he had had no idea that she was such a coward, and hurried away.

But the tender smile, and the tearful laugh

faded as he approached the prison, and as he came in sight of the stone walls and iron bars, the gloom and hopelessness of the place fell heavy on his warmly-beating heart. As he thought of the wretched man within, once abroad and free, with health, good looks, talents, and the world before him, and realized to what a condition a guilty love had brought him, a great pity for his fate swallowed up his loathing of the sin, and his abhorrence of the sinner. He had felt more aversion towards the man, before this last crime, and when he was honoured in the eyes of the world, than he did now.

He tried to imagine what his own feelings might be, if he should return to learn that the woman of his affections, so tenderly cherished in the warmest corner of his heart, had bestowed her love on some one else, and was lost for him. The sharp pang which even this thought caused him—this groundless thought, grant Heaven!—raised up in him heartfelt pity for the man, who must have suffered it a million times.

As he entered the prison, and paced the dark cold passage, with the gaoler conducting him, a prayer of pity towards the Author of all compassion in our hearts rose strong within him.

Heaven help him to speak words which might bring repentance and bring comfort ! Heaven be merciful to this sinner, so deeply dyed with blood, for which earth cried for vengeance—for he had loved much !

With these words on his lips, and heavenly compassion in his heart, the Minor Canon entered the cell where the prisoner was awaiting his trial, handcuffed and heavily chained.

They had not met face to face since that time, some months before, when they had journeyed up to London together. The Minor Canon was as erect and fresh,—just the same, to all outward appearance,—as if it had been yesterday ; but to the other, nearly ten years younger, what a change had come ! Twenty years of ordinary life could not have worked it. Twenty years of misery could have done no more. Bowed down and broken ; his hair streaked with grey ; his eyes bloodshot ; his face lined and marked like that of a man of fourscore ; his bushy and well-kept whiskers gone ; and the heavy, relentless chin, the thin, compressed and cruel lips, telling their own story—plainly to be read by the least observing eyes—so, one marked by God, and the other by sin—the good man and the bad man met.

“ This is the prisoner, sir,” said the gaoler.

“Look up, prisoner; here’s the gentleman come to see you. Here’s the Minor Canon.”

The man knew John Jasper well, as who did not in Cloisterham? but here he had lost all rank and title. Here he was only the prisoner.

“My orders is, to leave you alone together, sir,” began the keeper again, “but you’ve no reason to be afraid. He was wild and furious at first, so we were obliged to put him into chains, but he’s as quiet as a lamb now, and I’m outside within call. He can’t touch you, sir.”

“I’m not in the least afraid,” said the Minor Canon, quietly; yet, as the door clicked in the lock, and the heavy key turned, as he stood there facing the prisoner in the gloom of the prison, breathing the damp, chill atmosphere, tainted with prison breath, something, not fear, but an involuntary creeping of the flesh, made him shudder.

John Jasper had not looked up as the two entered, and he still remained impassive when the gaoler went, cowering down upon a rude bedstead, upon which he was sitting, motionless as death.

For a moment the Minor Canon waited for him to begin, but, as he still kept silent, the clergyman spoke.

“ You wished me to come to you,” he said, “ what can I do for you ? ”

There was no answer, no roused expression in the face to indicate that the words had been heard ; yet the chains clinked faintly, as if the prisoner trembled.

“ Oh, believe me,” said the Minor Canon, earnestly, “ that I do not stand before you as an accuser, or an enemy, but as one who longs to comfort you, and be your friend. Oh, believe me (laying his hand gently on the prisoner’s bowed head), that I can realise fully, for the first time that, if your sin was great and terrible, so also was the temptation, and that I am filled with the deepest compassion for you, and will serve you all I can.”

Still the prisoner sat rigid and still, but the Minor Canon noticed that a new expression began to break up the stupor of his face, and that his breast rose and fell more quickly than at first.

At that moment, the bells of the Cathedral began to ring for afternoon service. The prisoner started as he heard the old familiar sound, raised his eyes to the clergyman’s, and listened with rapt attention. As he listened, his eyes brightened, his chest heaved convulsively, his nostrils quivered ; that inward life of the soul, which seemed to have almost deserted him, came back with a rush.

Watching him attentively, the Minor Canon thought he understood what thus moved him, and gave utterance to his belief.

“That accustomed sound reminds you of former times,” he said, “when you were free; of old days when you were innocent; of associations which were yours when your life was not overshadowed as it is now. Oh, listen to that inward voice recalling those old times; repent—for the greater the sin, the greater the mercy—repent and be forgiven.”

“Fool, you!” exclaimed the prisoner, rising suddenly, and facing the astonished Minor Canon—how terribly the chains rattled as he did so!—“hear what I have to say, and spare me those idiotic remarks about forgiveness. When I ask to be forgiven, then palaver about your and your Master’s willingness to do so. When I repent—ha, ha! I can laugh still, you see!—then blabber about my penitence. I’ll tell you what I think about when those bells ring (I used to curse them often, little dreaming of the comfort they would be to me in the prison)—I also think of the time when I walked unfettered and honoured—aye, and loved, too—outside these walls, but not free, as you innocently imagine (milksofs like you, in whose languid veins runs water instead of blood; who have never

loved, and never can), but bound—bound in chains to which these are nothing.”

Again he raised his chained hands, and laughed triumphantly and wildly. Then, when the mocking echoes had ceased, he went on again.

“I also think of the many times when I sang in yonder pile, clothed in white like a saint; when no iron visible to the human eye manacled and galled me, but when I knew and felt that the iron had entered into my soul.”

With a wild and terrible cry he raised his fettered hands once more, as if he would appeal to Heaven as a witness that he spoke the truth. The awe-struck and shocked Minor Canon drew back a step.

“You used to say,” continued John Jasper, “and others used to say, that my voice, pealing through the Cathedral, was sweet as the voice of an angel. Oh, ye would-be wise ones of the earth, moles and bats are ye! for only I knew, and revelled in the knowledge, even then, that it was no angel’s, but the devil’s own voice to which ye listened enraptured; and that ye bowed down and worshipped—not in God’s but in Baal’s temple. Thus it is that I glory in the sound of the bells, and love to hear them in my narrow

cell—though I hated them before—for they, and only they, bring back to me clearly the difference between now and then. When they chime, I remember that the bonds which bound me are burst at last; that I have held my love in my arms, pressed her to my heart, revelled in the sweetness of her lips; and that she is mine now, and must be mine for ever. Then I recognise to the full that in the prison I have regained my freedom, that I was bound and am free.”

He was silent for a moment, listening to the clear sound of the bells with a smiling mouth; then, turning towards the Minor Canon, he inquired—

“Where have they laid her?”

“God, in His mercy,” answered the clergyman, firmly and almost severely, “has spared you from the committal of that crime. She is saved!”

The wretched man made a sudden bound towards the speaker with raised hands, as if he would crush him, but paused, even before he had reached the end of his chain, and smiled as if amused, while the fury faded out of his eyes as rapidly as it had come.

“Bah!” he exclaimed, “*I* am making a fool of myself now. You are telling a lie to frighten me. I know she is dead. I feel it

here (striking himself upon the breast). If she were not—but she is, she is—I should break through stone walls and iron bars to get to her. I felt her die, I tell you, on my heart—on my heart, her natural resting-place, where she will rest for ever now, for I shall die and go to her. Ye cannot take her from me. No one can; no one dare. I shall die and go to her, where she is waiting for me. Welcome death! welcome, even on a scaffold! I sit here, happy in captivity, because she lies in my arms, and I whisper to her of my love,” and he flung himself down upon his straw mattress, and pressed it convulsively to his heart.

But, as the bells ceased, the light died out of his eyes; the rapture faded; and he grew quiet and composed. The Minor Canon had made a motion as if to summon the keeper, which the prisoner seemed to feel rather than to see, for, without rising, he peremptorily requested him to remain. His voice sounded hard and cold, his bearing and manner were totally different to what they had been as the bells rang, as he said—

“Not yet, Mr. Chrisparkle. You will not grudge a dying man the benefit of your ghostly counsel. I am going to make this cell—well adapted for the purpose—into a

confessional, and to make you my father confessor. Take a chair, sir. It is a poor chair, certainly, neither cushioned nor padded, but perhaps you will be kind enough to remember that it is the best I have to offer you, and make allowance for its deficiencies. What, you will not stay and hear me—you decline to hear these interesting confessions of a criminal, and are determined to neglect this never-to-be-recalled opportunity of tickling the respected ears of Cloisterham. Ah, you are yielding; I thought you would. The story promises to be exciting, and even a clergyman can't resist that. There, make yourself as comfortable as you can, for I have much to tell you.

“Why do I tell it, not being penitent? nay, declaring at the outset, to prevent any sanguine hopes of yours, that I utterly decline the favour of an absolution, and would do it all again, if I had it still to do. Perhaps, I am still man enough—that is to say, still frail enough—to wish to relieve myself of a burden which I have carried alone for years, and to shift some portion of it on another; perhaps, I am proud of the skill and perseverance which I have exhibited, and want to win the applause I have earned; perhaps I want to show the world that my

plans were perfect, and admirably carried out, and that no one could have discovered them, or ferreted out the facts, if I had not disclosed them with my own lips. Perhaps it is all these reasons together, or perhaps one of them, or perhaps another reason totally opposed to these—no matter, I have resolved to tell it. For years I have lived for only one object, and been filled with only one desire. I have strained every nerve to attain it, and I have done so, though not quite in the way I intended. Never mind! I *have* attained it, and I am satisfied.”

“It is my duty to tell you,” interrupted the Minor Canon, “that your own words may be used against you on your trial, and may help to criminate you. Remember that!”

“Do you think I care to live, now that she is dead?” he answered, “the law can only take my life, and that is of no value to me—nay, it is hated by me. If the law should spare me, I would take it myself.”

The Minor Canon turned sick, almost paralysed with horror. How terrible was all this! Where were all his hopes that the sinner was penitent and longed to be forgiven? In his love for truth, and strict conscientiousness, he feared it might be his duty to disabuse him of his delusion, and

prove to him beyond doubt, that the girl lived. And yet, what awful consequences might ensue if he did so? He did not dare to reveal it, and he could not go, for a sort of fascination rooted him to the spot.

“What shall we call my story?” said the prisoner, reflectively, as if that were the only matter for consideration and thought. “We must give it a title, you know. Ha! I have it. ‘The Secret of the Grave.’ A charming title, is it not? At once mysterious and attractive. ‘The Secret of the Grave,’ therefore.”

Sitting opposite him, filled with terror, and yet compelled to listen, almost against his will, the Minor Canon, leaning forward on the chair, with fascinated eyes upon the prisoner, heard this horrible confession.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET OF THE GRAVE.

“ ‘To begin at the beginning,’ as the story-tellers say,” commenced John Jasper, “I must go back a long way—back to the time when I was a boy, about ten or eleven years of age, and my nephew, Edwin Drood, a little child. Looking back to that time, with intent to realise what sort of a boy I was, I can only remember one thing with any degree of clearness. Standing out like a vivid light athwart the dull gloom and sameness of my uninteresting and hopeless boyhood—I still see its reflection—intense and concentrated as my nature, one feeling rose dominant to all others, and seemed the only emotion of which at that time I was capable—a feeling of passionate hatred towards—you will be surprised to hear it, for you thought I loved him—towards that child.

“I was a quiet, reserved, obstinate boy, unamiable and little beloved; and he was outspoken, frank and free; in all respects my opposite. Many a time, when I had been punished (and I was punished often, and often unjustly, for I was too proud to clear myself,

even when I could), my disciplinarians would say: 'Shame on you! Look at little Edwin! Take pattern by little Edwin—so much younger, so much more amiable and tractable!' Many a time (we were brought up together, as you know, for I was still earlier left an orphan than he) when we had been engaged in some boyish mischief, in which, although six years younger, he was always the ringleader—I only took part in it in hopes of bringing him into trouble—I was invariably the one to suffer for it. He would wheedle, and coax, and sob, and pray to be forgiven, and promise never to do so any more—a promise made to be broken. Then he would be kissed, and loved, and petted, the while the chorus would arise and swell again—'What a difference there is between the two! What a loving heart this child has, and what a hard one the other!' No torture would have induced me to sue for forgiveness, and they knew it. And when my nephew, witnessing my punishment, and knowing well how to curry favour, would cry out, weeping—he always pretended to be generous—that it was he who was the most to blame, and that they must whip him, and not me—louder and more vehemently than ever he would be praised and caressed.

‘Bless the little darling! Learn to imitate him, bad, hard-hearted boy—him, so much younger and so much better!’ So they sowed diligently the seeds of hatred in my heart, and wondered, miserable fools! to see them spring up and grow.”

“But this feeling towards an innocent child is dreadful!” exclaimed the Minor Canon, as the prisoner paused with glowing eyes, out of which the old hatred gleamed so fiercely still, that it was evident that neither death nor the grave between them had been able to quench it; “this is dreadful, Jasper; base and wicked!”

“*This* is nothing,” said the prisoner, mockingly. “Strengthen your nerves, revd. sir, which seem remarkably weak, with a glass of wine before I proceed. There is a bottle of wine and a glass upon the table there. I am coming now to the full-grown hatred of the man, to which the boyish feeling will bear no comparison. The plant was a tender plant as yet, might have been torn up by the roots still; but it had been planted in fruitful ground, and, carefully nourished and nurtured as it was on every side, it grew and flourished mightily.

“Strange enough, though I hated the boy, ever more and more—for all things favoured

him—he loved me, or rather, pretended to love me. ‘Let Jack have the best of it. The larger half for Jack,’ was his cry from infancy. It was a cunning device to win praise and love from others, but I saw through it plainly, and it never won me. Yet, as time wore on, and I grew older, came greater depth of reflection, more subtlety of thought, and I began to see, that to exhibit this feeling of hatred to the world was to put it out of my power to do him any real harm. I had only been as a dark background, and shown up more clearly, by comparison, his beauty, and his light. In appearing openly as his enemy, I should only succeed in having him taken from me and well protected on every hand. In order to really injure him, I must pretend to be his friend; for only thus could I gain the opportunity and power to stab him in the dark.

“Pretence was not so easy to me, as it was to him, for I possessed a sullen and obdurate nature, which would rather break than bend; but I had sense enough to perceive clearly that I must abandon my former habit of continually wounding him slightly now, in order to wound him to death hereafter. And, conquering the difficulties, which my own disposition raised up to baffle me, I did so with

a steadiness of purpose, and relentlessness of determination, rarely to be found in a boy, and in which I glory still."

That he did, was evident from the look of triumph in his face; apparent even in the gloom of the prison. With raised head, smiling lips, and dilated nostrils, he continued.

"I played my cards well, and won, as every man can win, if he has strength of mind to will with purpose. First, they said, I was improving, then, improved. Instead of a perpetual warning to Edwin, I became, in one respect, a sort of model, in my turn. Jack was a living example of the benefits arising from a strict and rigorous discipline. The correcting rod had not been spared in the case of Jack (Heaven knows it had not!) and the child was saved. Jack was not quite the reprobate and fool he had been believed to be. He had one talent, at least, that he had not buried in a napkin. The petted, indulged, charming boy had to play second fiddle to Jack in one respect. Jack could sing, and Jack could play, and did play, on the old piano of his dead sister, Edwin's mother, always better and better. The son and heir felt no jealousy, of course, not even now. The same tune that he had sung as a

baby, he sung again. This is how the melody ran : ‘ Let Jack learn, papa. Jack has genius, let him have the best of masters.’ Bah, I sicken at the sound of it ! But I kept my own counsel. I took the crusts, as I had taken the kicks, in deferential silence, and licked the hands of my benefactors.

“ So they let Jack learn, and why ? Surely the answer is plain, and easy to be understood. Jack had been eating the bread of idleness long enough, and must learn to earn it. Jack must not be a burden upon Edwin. Jack might make a very good music-master, and give capital interest for the money invested in him. Thus this poor Jack, in whom burned the light of genius, was to be shackled and hindered from spreading his wings for flight. If Jack needed nourishment, let him devour his own heart, and relish the diet, if he could.’

“ Oh, Jasper, Jasper ; how wickedly you pervert and distort the facts you relate ! I knew your brother-in-law, and respected him, and am sure that he meant you only kindness. I knew your murdered nephew, whom you so cruelly and foully wrong, and am sure that he truly loved you.”

For a moment, the prisoner eyed the Minor Canon with an evil and lowering eye, then sneered contemptuously. “ Why should I

argue with you? Why be angry with one born blind, because he cannot see? Our allotted time is not endless, and I have much more to tell you.

“About this period, I think Edwin must have been about nine years of age, and I, fifteen, something occurred which made me forget my hate—forget everything but it. You will remember the circumstances, attendant on the death of her—her mother. Mr. Bud, an intimate friend of my brother-in-law’s, had lost his beautiful young wife in a sudden and most harrowing manner, and my brother-in-law frequently went to comfort him in his bereavement. After a time he began to return these visits (I remember him as a young man, bowed down with the intensity of his grief; he followed her, a year later) bringing his little girl, from whom he was inseparable, with him.

“At the sight of this little girl, at the very first sight, I do believe, I learned that my heart was capable of another feeling, a passion, stronger and more powerful than even hate; for the hatred, which had before absorbed my every faculty, finding itself, for the first time, unheeded and unfed, shrank away abashed, leaving my heart free for its great adversary which, entering in triumph, began to reign there in its stead.

“I do not know what love means in the mouth of another man, for I have little experience of my fellow creatures. I do not know that I can explain even what it means in mine. I only know that, for the first time, I realized that I was a creature born for all eternity, because this new feeling, new to me and yet as old as God, must live for ever.

“I do not mean to say, that this emotion sprang at its birth into full maturity. That would be unnatural and absurd, and no one would believe that a little child, a baby, could awaken such a feeling, but it drew its first breath of life at sight of her, and in course of time has grown to what it is. And in my heart, filled to the brim with this strange ineffable delight, there was no longer room for hate—it either withdrew altogether to make way for the new occupant, or, dissolving in its presence, melted into love.”

Tears sprang to the Minor Canon's eyes, tears of hot sympathy. Forgetting how stained was the hand of the speaker, he stretched out his own to grasp it; but it was coldly and contemptuously repulsed, and in an unmoved and unfaltering voice, the prisoner continued—

“I was happy then. For the first time in my life, I understood that happiness was not

only an idle word, or a pretty fable, but a wonderful reality. I had found an object in life ; something to live for ; something to attain ; and I worked hard, and worked earnestly to enable me to do so. They praised me all, my masters and my rulers, and acknowledged that I did them credit ; but my highest reward was, to see my baby goddess standing still to listen when I sang, with bright eyes wide with wonder, and to know that I—that I, had power to entrance her. Oh, for one short space of time I was truly happy ! ”

His voice grew dreamy and he closed his eyes for a moment, as if he would recall the old time when he had felt this bliss and had been innocent. When he opened them again, the Minor Canon fancied that they glistened through unshed tears, and his voice trembled as he went on hurriedly, as if afraid of his resolution faltering.

“ I can see her now, as she was then,—so plainly, that she might be standing by me in the prison. Not one of your pink and white bits of goodness. A resolute child ; quick to anger, and quick to penitence. A child far oftener naughty than good ; far oftener wilful than obedient. Restless and impatient of control, she would have torn herself to

pieces against the curb, but answered to the slightest touch of the reins in the hands of love. I used to laugh inwardly over the wisdom of my own masters and rulers who, wagging together their solemn heads in counsel, would resolve that the same strict and rigorous discipline, which had made of the reprobate Jack such a bright and shining light, ought to be applied to the baby rebel, who so saucily defied them. Idiots! they might have disciplined her to death, but would never have broken her in. Fortunately for her, her destiny, kinder than mine, did not deliver her into their hands.

“I can see her now, with her small face, so changeful in expression, so wondrously beautiful, that it seemed to me, as if every change increased its magical charm; now flushed with hot anger; now paling, as her tender heart told her that she had grieved her dearly loved and sorrowful papa; now frowning over some trifle not to her liking; now dimpled with laughter, and mischief; now bathed in tears. Every time more beautiful than it had been before. Always, from the very first, my ideal of beauty, my only one, from the first and to the last.

“I could have laboured a life-time for her possession, content with the certainty of my

reward at its end. I would have granted my nephew anything, everything, else that fate could give him. Riches, goodwill, love, happiness. Let him keep his flocks and herds! I only asked to be allowed to earn my one little ewe-lamb."

He stopped, for thick drops of sweat stood on his pale forehead, even in the chilly atmosphere, and the foam gathered round his lips. Fierce and furious boiled within him the fury and passion he had been compelled to subdue so long, and some minutes elapsed before he was able to proceed.

"Although I always felt sure that she would be mine, yet sometimes the old jealousy and hate towards my nephew struggled to regain possession of my heart. When I sang, she would listen speechless with delight, at a distance; but when I ended, she was gone. She never fondled or caressed me, as she did almost every one else; but she never teased me, either. She would play with Edwin, and lustily quarrel with him often. I have seen her (watching them both hungrily from a spot where they could not see me) slap him smartly with her tiny hand; scold him vigorously with her baby voice; but I have seen her kiss him, too. I can feel the pang now as I felt it each time then, when

I saw her raise her rosy lips, although his touched them so carelessly.

“Not that I wanted to kiss her myself—not yet; but I could not bear others to do so, and particularly, I could not bear it from him. I meant to kiss her in the time to come; I, as man, she, as woman; and to have done so now would have been, to my mind, like foolishly quaffing the juice of the grape before it had undergone that wonderful transformation into wine—like plucking the bud before it had ripened into the flower.

“You remember, sir, as I said before, that Mr. Bud died of grief a year after his wife, and that the child was left an orphan. She was put to school, as you know, and for many a long year I saw her no more. Edwin and Edwin’s father went to visit her sometimes, but I never accompanied them. There was a kind of under talk even then that the little folk were intended for a pair, but I neither listened to it, nor heeded it. I made so sure, you see, that she must and would be mine—so sure, that at the end of the long years of hard and earnest work to win means and a position to lay at her feet, I had only to go in and claim her.

“My diligence and untiring industry were rewarded at last by an appointment which

would enable me to earn my bread, if not brilliantly, at any rate, creditably and decently. I was elected choir-master of the Cathedral in Cloisterham, and, in addition to this, there was a large connection in the matter of private pupils. I was a clever and careful master, and so discreet and sedate with the young ladies, that my praises were on every tongue. I doubled the connection, and if I could have doubled myself, should still have had enough to do. I was no bad looking fellow, either. Straight and well-built, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with even, regular features, and teeth white and polished as ivory, I was looked upon with no unfavourable eye by many of my older female pupils, and pretty plainly given to understand sometimes that, if I chose to make love to them, I might do so with impunity; but they were one and all powerless either to please my fancy, or to touch my heart. I cannot even remember how they looked, or which among them was dark, or which was fair. To me they were only dull blocks of humanity, into whom I had to instil, if possible, with infinite labour and endless drudgery, some idea of melody, some notion of tune, and I doubt if even one of their own sex would have been so totally indifferent to their charms as I was. I never

felt that they were flesh and blood : there existed for me but one woman in the world.

“ Shortly after my installation in Cloisterham, Edwin’s father died. I was considered now in the light of a rising man, and universally esteemed and respected. I lived a sober, serious life, free from vice and dissoluteness, and not even the most evil-conditioned tongue ventured to wag to my discredit. My brother-in-law, apparently fully satisfied as to my intrinsic merits, had appointed me in his will guardian to his only child—had commended him to my love, and, in addition to this, had left me a small sum of money as executor, and his blessing. His blessing, you understand, after having delivered me over in my childhood and boyhood to the tender mercies of those aforesaid masters and rulers. Well, I knew how to be grateful.

“ I had played my part so well, that every one felt it to be the most natural and satisfactory thing in the world that I should have been chosen for this post. I had played it so well, that the whole town, and you also, thought I had abandoned my own claims on youth and happiness, and only lived for him. So I did. So I did !

“ It was then I became aware, for the first

time with certainty, that there had been truth in those whispered reports, that my nephew was intended for the girl I loved. There had been a sort of betrothal between them, even during the lifetime of Mr. Drood, in accordance with his earnest wish, and in consequence of the plans which both parents had fondly cherished before Mr. Bud died.

“The children, knowing nothing of what love meant, yet tickled and elated at the prospect, charming to their inexperience, had consented willingly—she as well as he. I shall never forget the insolent arrogance with which he boasted about this betrothal, and of his power over her. I shall never forget the way in which he would talk of restraining her here, and hampering her there—showing in every word and look how much he felt himself as lord and master. I shall never forget how he traduced her lovely face, openly exposing to the rude gaze of others in a portrait, an expression which his own treatment roused there; a hint—he called it—a hint to model herself after his liking. What a difference between us! *I* did not wish to be her master, only her humblest slave.

“The knowledge that I should have to struggle with him for her possession neither surprised nor discomposed me much. It was

a natural sequence to our lives as yet, in which he had had all the good things, and I all the evil ones. And perhaps there would be no need of struggling. He had no character at all; was as easy to move as a bit of straw, carried in a different direction with every whiff of wind—but she had plenty. The time would come when the breath of love would be breathed into her slumbering heart, and it would awake out of its torpor; she would know then that she could never love him; would feel the fetters shackling her; would throw them off (I knew how the least control irritated her of old), and would be free again. The time would come, and I could bide it.

“In the meantime she had become my pupil, and in the first joy of these weekly meetings, I forgot all else. To sit by her side, close, close to her, to feel the fragrance of her breath, to even touch her sometimes, were delights so great, so inexpressible, that I wonder I did not die for very rapture. Every nerve, aroused to a thousand times its normal sensitiveness, quivered and tingled for joy in her presence with an intensity which bordered on—nay, was—absolute pain.

“Nevertheless, as the time went on, I began to feel some anxiety and some uneasi-

ness. For her heart, even in the atmosphere of my passionate love, gave no sign of life. If it had been roused, of which I was not sure, it feigned still to sleep. Only one thing gave me comfort—she had begun to feel the shackles in which she was bound, and to chafe against them. The discontented expression which my nephew had represented, with such coarse truthfulness in his portrait of her lovely face, deepened sometimes into actual unhappiness. I have seen her look at me with fear and dread, and I knew she quarrelled incessantly with her betrothed: he would return to me after an interview with her, to complain of her treatment of him, and with his vanity and self-conceit—the only qualities he possessed—sharply wounded. However much he still boasted of mastering her, when she was his wife, it was plain to see that she lorded it over him finely now. But for all this—and it was that which caused me unspeakable concern—they always made it up again, with tears and kisses; and still sailed steadily, in spite of adverse wind and tide, towards the haven of their marriage, as if that were the only course possible.

“Then I began to feel that this betrothal, which I had almost viewed in the light of a safeguard, preventing others from aspiring to

her charms, grew into a real and imminent danger. The time appointed for their union was no longer in the far distance, but close at hand, and her slumbering heart slept, to all appearance, still. I knew it would—must, wake up some time or other; but what could it avail me—what avail her? if it woke too late? And to have known her in the possession of another, even for a single hour, would have driven me mad.

“I had always hated him: for the old boyish hatred, driven away for a time by the new emotion, had soon proved itself only stunned and not dead, and resumed dominion of me. Besides, his lips had ventured to steal kisses from the sweet lips of my love, and that was an offence in my eyes never to be blotted out. I had resolved, long before, smarting with indignation at witnessing the robbery, that he should pay a heavy, heavy price for those kisses, when my time came.

“But hatred is not murder—only the road to it; and whoever traverses that road, may know what he will come to at the end. Therefore I, who had been walking on it so long, saw the last stage of the journey close before me, and saw it, hardly appalled, and no whit amazed.

“Clear him out of the way? It was only

the question: either he or I, and self-preservation is the first law of Nature. Clear away the obstacle which hemmed the current of my life? Yes, I would. But how?

“I felt no remorse, and certainly no tenderness towards him, and yet some feeling or wish to give him one more chance, made me warn him of the danger he was incurring. I did warn him once or twice, but he was too entirely the fool to comprehend me. I could not help that, and when you condemn me, as men of your sort are sure to condemn, remember that I warned him.”

The Minor Canon had covered his face with his hand, as if he could not bear to look at the man before him. He tried to speak, in answer to this direct appeal, but the words died away upon his agitated lips, and the effort almost choked him. He could only bow his head in response.

“There have been times, I tell you,” continued the prisoner, “when I have undergone absolute agony, not because my soul revolted against the idea of murdering him, but because I could hardly await in patience the fitting time to do it.

“There have been times, when, as he sat before me, puffed up with pride and miserable self-conceit; gloating over, and boasting

of his good luck and fortune, which he had never raised a lazy hand to earn, and yet accepted as his unquestionable due—when I have been hardly able to resist the strong impulse to blot out all youth and beauty from his insolent face, with my heavy fist upon it, and trample him to death then and there, under my outraged feet.

“I laid my plans wilily and carefully. The first necessity was to avert all shadow of suspicion from myself, and cunningly throw it upon another. This was difficult, because the boy—curse him!—had no enemies besides me. This caused me so much anxious consideration and thought that I was obliged to resort to artificial means (I took to smoking opium) to gain rest and ease.

“But fortune favoured me, or rather, the devil, who always can find his followers materials for carrying out any such a purpose, and I soon alighted upon a tool, which would suit me to perfection. I allude, sir, to your dark-haired, dark-skinned, hot-blooded young Indian.

“The first time I met him at your house, I had my eye upon him. He was a young man, and a handsome; and every human being of the male gender, possessing these advantages, and brought into contact with

my love, was an object of suspicion to me. I soon observed that he was struck and fascinated by her beauty ; and that was enough to make me hate him. I soon observed that he was not favourably disposed towards my nephew, for the same reason that I was not ; and then I knew that I had found my tool, and that it only wanted sharpening. That evening I resolved to lose no time in sharpening it.

“The young men accompanied the ladies to ‘The Nuns’ House’ that evening, as you have reason to remember, Mr. Chrisparkle, and I slunk, unobserved, behind them. They came back alone, together, all unconscious of my proximity ; and very soon, to my great satisfaction, I heard them begin to quarrel, as I had foreseen they would.

“I had let them come to hot and angry words before I interposed, and then, coming up behind them, as if by purest accident, I discreetly dropped some oil into the smouldering fire, until it blazed up again fierce and high.

“Pretending to be shocked, I endeavoured to restore peace between them—apparently successfully—and then I invited them to enter my lodging and drink together a friendly glass of wine as a sign of complete reconciliation. They could not well decline to do so, and they came.

“I drugged the wine, and by a little skilful manœuvring soon had them by the ears again. My work was ridiculously easy. If I had chosen, Mr. Chrisparkle, I might have had murder in my house that evening; for it was all I could do to separate them. But the time for carrying out my scheme was not fully ripe, and besides, there must be no chance of his escaping, anyway. No possibility of his being only half killed and recovering. I must make quite sure of that.

“The next day I had enough to do in spreading the news, and in making sure—without myself being a too active propagator—that the whole town should hear, and what was more, digest them.

“I foresaw that you, sir, would keep your own counsel, and that shame would tie the young men’s tongues.

“I succeeded again beyond expectation. The whole town learned that young Mr. Landless had made a murderous attack upon my nephew; and also, what was of far more importance, *why* he had done so. Even the noddle-headed inhabitants of Cloisterham understood that, although every means would be taken to keep the young men apart, and to avoid a collision between them, the cause of enmity still existed, and that any moment might bring a second explosion.”

“He told me there was something amiss with the wine,” murmured the horror-struck clergyman, “and I did not believe him. Poor, poor Neville !”

“Aye, poor, poor Neville,” repeated the prisoner, bitterly, “and never, poor Jasper. And yet I had been suffering worse torments than any Tantalus, ever since my childhood. What were his sufferings compared to mine ? A mere drop in the ocean—a mere nothing.”

There was silence in the cell for a few moments after this. The Minor Canon was too appalled to speak, even if any words could have been of avail with this man ; while the prisoner tried to subdue his rising anger. Then John Jasper’s voice rose again.

“My tool finely sharpened, and ready to my hand, I had only to consider further in reference to *it*—when and where ? These questions were so trivial and so easy to be solved, that I put them aside for a time and devoted the whole of my attention to the last point, and the most important one. What was to be done with the body ?

“I had read so often, and heard so often, how very, very frequently the discovery of the real murderer followed the discovery of the corpse, that I felt I must give most close and earnest attention to this particular. A

few hairs, a scrap of clothing, a footmark, a trifle forgotten in the agitation of the moment, a speck of blood—had one and all been proved sufficient to turn attention towards the real murderer, even though he had laid traps and pitfalls for another with a wary hand; and had, on thousands of occasions, led to his ruin.

“To prevent this in my case—to prevent the possibility of this, the body must be buried, or destroyed so effectually as to render its chance of ever, pieced or whole, bones or flesh, reappearing before the eyes of men, an absolute null. The river might cast it upon its banks, the ocean upon its shore, dogs might scent it in its newly-dug grave, fire prove incapable to destroy it. Again, absorbing my every faculty by night and by day, came the perplexing query: How?

“I racked my weary brain to find an answer, but for a long time without success. Many ideas occurred to me, but only, after careful test, to be rejected as impracticable. I had smoked opium moderately before; I took to smoking it immoderately now, in order to irritate my brain into compliance with the demand upon it; sometimes so immoderately that it refused to work altogether for a time, and I sank into lethargy.

“I thought about it during my daily drudgery; in the company of my nephew; even by *her* side. I thought about in the Cathedral, chanting or singing, and when my voice resounded through the ancient pile, moving others to tears, and to increased earnestness in their devotions, I knew what it was asking, ever and always—How shall I do it? how shall I do it?

“At last the answer came to me suddenly, with the recollection of an interview I had had some time before with a man, the most unlikely in the world to be the suggestor of an idea. And yet, in a manner, he had been, though quite unconsciously.

“I had for some time past, in pursuance of my one plan, endeavoured to ingratiate myself with the more influential inhabitants of the town—to get the blind side of them, as the saying is—and thus I had brought myself into contact with one who, by reason of his innate stupidity, I suppose (for I know no other), had attained a high—and was destined to attain a still higher—position in the place. The immediate result was a dreary supper, and a still drearier conversation (I yawn still at the remembrance), and yet, going back to it in thought at this later period, out of the words of that unmitigated Jackass, I drew my clue.

“To bury him—in no pauper’s grave, or out in field or wood, where the faintest sign might be sufficient to arrest attention, or where a stray dog might scent the newly-slain. To bury him—in a grave dug for another, in a coffin put together with no reference to him, in consecrated ground, and under a stately monument, befitting his position as his father’s son and my near relation. To know him there, cleared out of the way for ever, and—under no necessity to shun the spot, for who could ever guess what it concealed—to revel in this knowledge every time I passed his resting place. What a continuous source of nourishment for my long-famished heart! What an original—what a grand idea! Do you begin to see light, Mr. Chrisparkle? Do you comprehend why I called my story, ‘The Secret of the Grave.’”

The Minor Canon made no answer—how could he? But he leaned forward breathlessly to hear the rest.

“I laughed out loud as it occurred to me—for the first time for months; for years, I think—laughed out loud and free. My nephew was with me at the time, and I remember he turned round to look at me with eyes full of wonder.

“‘Jack, dear old boy, how merry you are to-night,’ he said.

“At that I laughed again, more loudly than ever, and he joined in heartily. Like all empty-headed people of his age, he could giggle at anything and nothing. What a mercy that the thoughts of the heart are not readable upon the face! If he could have divined the cause of my mirth!

“On that same opportunity, I had made another acquaintance: and going home, weary to death, on the road between Mr. Sapsea’s residence and my own humble abode in the Gate House, I stumbled again upon this man. It was the stonemason Durdles, in whom I felt an uncomfortable interest—uncomfortable, because I had heard that he possessed a strange and almost supernatural gift of discovering, with pretty certain accuracy, where the dead were buried. This gift of his might be very awkward to me, and I felt it necessary to sound him.

“He was just that degree drunk that the task of sounding him was considerably lightened. I took him in tow, therefore, first getting rid of a remarkably vicious small boy, his companion; and so shallow was he and his wisdom, that I soon got to the bottom of him. To use another metaphor, I turned him completely inside out.

“With his inside thus conveniently ex-

posed to my searching gaze, I discovered that his method of finding out where a dead body lay was regulated by a certain sort of mathematical calculation; that his ear, from long practice, had attained a really remarkable fineness in assisting him; and that his discoveries were by no means only the result of some fortunate guess, or purest chance, as I had been inclined to consider them. Having satisfied myself as to this, and still further gained the knowledge that his inside would always be at my disposal if previously accommodated with a stiff glass of grog, or other fermented liquor, I left him. Only as a possible danger regarding the discovery of the body, was Durdles capable of interesting me at that period.

“But now, with this new plan in my head, he became a matter of deep and absorbing interest. The more I thought about it, the better it pleased me, and I grew every minute more sanguine as to its success. Carefully carried out; every detail considered before hand; every possible emergency provided for; every danger avoided; it must succeed. And then, freed of my deadliest enemy and hated rival, I would begin a new life with her. For that I should win her in the end, I never doubted. This great passion

was not given me for nothing. I should win her, for I would.

“The first thing to be obtained was the co-operation of Durdles—not his spiritual co-operation, of course, but his bodily. The next, was to fix the hour and the day. You yourself, Mr. Chrisparkle, were the one to bring that to a point. I dare say you remember calling upon me one evening to beg me to exert my influence with Edwin, and induce him to hold out a hand of reconciliation to your young Indian, do you not?”

As the prisoner looked at him for an answer, the Minor Canon made a gesture of assent. If anything could have made this horrible confession more horrible, it would have been the composure, swelling sometimes into triumphant exultation, with which it was narrated.

An occasional burst of anger flashed out once or twice, and threatened to disturb its even current, but only for a moment. Looking back upon his past life from the verge of the grave, John Jasper appeared to see it with a startling clearness, just as a drowning man is said to do.

No one could doubt, hearing him, that this love and this hate had been the ruling motives of his life, and that without them he must

die. No one could doubt, hearing him, the accuracy of the facts and feelings he narrated, nor that this story was not only a part of, but his whole life.

“You did not notice perhaps,” he continued, “that your proposal quite confounded me. It was no part of my plan to quench the animosity between these two, or to allow them to be reconciled. And yet to refuse would have aroused wonder and, very probably, suspicion. I rapidly reviewed all the details of my plan, and came to the conclusion that I should incur the smaller danger by complying with your request. I did so, therefore, with an appearance of great cordiality. Then it was that the sands in my nephew’s life-glass ran low indeed, and that the few remaining hours he had to live were easy to be counted.

“I immediately put myself into communication with Durdles, and obtained as much of his goodwill as he had to spare (little enough, for his stock-in-hand was as small as my own), by pampering to the clamorous claims of his exorbitant inside frequently and liberally.

“I then proposed to accompany him in his nightly rounds, and view the inside of the old Cathedral, so wearily familiar to me by

day, in the new light of night. A bottle in perspective, and Durdles would have been willing to be accompanied by the devil himself. Surprise was totally foreign to the sot's nature, and I took care to guard against it in the minds of others, by carelessly referring to this proposed expedition in their presence. So the night came, and the bottle,—and Durdles was ready.

“The particulars of our ramble through the old building, up in the tower and down in the vaults, would prove as uninteresting to you as they were to me, and are foreign to the purpose here. Suffice it to say, as the time went on, the bottle—or, rather, the contents of the bottle, judiciously drugged—had silenced the clamorous insatiability of Durdles' inside for a time, and we had hardly regained the crypt, before emerging, when I saw that my object was attained. Durdles, overpowered, sank down in a state of utter unconsciousness.

“I had the keys, which he carried, in my possession in a moment—the key which would open the door of the crypt, and another key,—that belonging to the monument of the late Mrs. Sapsea.”

The Minor Canon uttered a sharp exclamation of amaze; raising his hand, and regarding the prisoner with a wild look of terror.

“Ah, you begin to understand,” said John Jasper, smiling (what a smile!). “That last was the key which I had been struggling to obtain, and which I knew he had not yet delivered up to Mr. Sapsea, but frequently carried about with him. Without that key, my whole plan would have been frustrated, and I should have had to begin over again. Fortunately, this was not necessary. I had had it in my hand once before, and I knew it for certain, the moment that I touched it.

“Durdles slept where he had fallen, heavily. He was safe to sleep for a good hour or two, and in the meantime I had work to do, and not an instant’s time to lose in doing it.

“I crept out of the crypt and looked carefully around me. The moon shone bright and clear, and I could see distinctly all over the Close and the immediate neighbourhood. No human being was to be seen or heard. I made quite certain of that before I emerged into the moonlight. The time might be about twelve o’clock at night.

“I hurried, quick as thought, towards the churchyard. There, cunningly concealed in the immediate neighbourhood of Mrs. Sapsea’s monument, lay certain things which I had placed there beforehand—a sack, a lantern, various tools. Equipped with these, I turned

towards the monument, and drawing out the rusty key, placed it in the lock.

“It was so little used that all my strength was not sufficient to turn it, but even for this emergency I was provided. I had prudently brought a little bottle of oil with me, and after carefully lubricating the key and the lock, I was enabled, without all-too-great exertion, to open the door and enter.

“For a few moments I paused upon the threshold of this house appointed for the dead, and let in a little fresh air before descending. Then I summoned up all my resolution, lit my lantern, opened a trap-door at my feet, and going down a few steps, found myself in the vault.

“To deny that my heart beat faster than usual, or that my pulse throbbed feverishly, would be to lie, Mr. Chrisparkle, and my story is, from first to last, true, every word of it. I was but a man after all, and although my nerves were steeled to do the work I had appointed myself, I felt to the full how horrible it was; and I sickened at first in the chilly and loathsome air, while the cold sweat of an unutterable loathing and terror rose to my brow. But I never thought of going back and abandoning my project; no, not once.

“I took a deep draught of a cordial which I had brought with me, and it so far revived me that I was able to look about, and carefully review the place before commencing my work. The vault was about eight feet square, well built and tolerably dry. Mr. Sapsea had spared no expense, as I knew. Then my eye fell upon a solitary coffin—the only coffin in the vault—wherein lay the mortal remains of the late Mrs. Sapsea.

“It was a very handsome coffin, elegantly decorated and of massive oak. On the lid was a silver plate, on which I read by the light of my lantern, ‘Ethelinda Sapsea, aged forty-three.’ It stood upon a sort of trestle of stone.

“Towards this coffin was directed my principal attention, because it was what I wanted—wanted for a new occupant, for whose accommodation, I must dislodge the old one. I immediately began therefore, without further waste of time, and without further thought or reflection, which I dreaded, to loosen the screws which tightly held down the lid, so as to be able to open the coffin.

“I was unskilful and awkward at this new and unaccustomed work, and it progressed slowly. I was obliged, too, to have frequent recourse to my cordial, for I more than once

turned sick and faint. But at last all the screws were drawn out, and I was at liberty to remove the lid.

“I did so without one moment’s pause for thought. I dared not think, you see. With trembling haste I tore off the lid and looked down upon the corpse. I had prepared myself for the rising of a foul and loathsome odour which I expected would ensue, but to my surprise, the air already impure and mouldy, did not grow much more impure. I believe the corpse must have been embalmed in some way against decay. I had prepared myself for that, I say, and had bound a loose handkerchief before my mouth and nose, but I was not prepared for what I saw, or fancied.

“I saw the dead eyes, sunken in the dead face, open and look at me. I saw the dead mouth utter words. There was no sound in the vault except the ticking of the watch in my pocket, and the wild beating of my heart, which bounded fiercely at first, and then stood still to listen.

“Without sound, and yet as plainly audible as if they had been words of thunder—not heard, but felt—the long-dead and long-buried Mrs. Sapsea made me understand these words: ‘Thou hast planned well, mortal, to hide thy

secret from all living eyes, but hadst forgotten these dead ones of mine which, though dead, can see thee. Know, that when the witnesses rise up against thee, I shall be among them.' Then the eyes closed again, the mouth stood still, and only a dead face, shrivelled and shrunken, dried up and withered, lay motionless before me. And my paralysed heart began to beat again.

“With the exertion of all my strength, bodily and mental, I gathered up the dead body, and thrust it into the sack, brought for that purpose, laid the lid carefully upon the coffin, put my tools into my pocket, and, with my lantern in my hand, and the sack with its awful contents upon my back, staggered up the steps again, and once more emerged into the moonlight. The churchyard and the Close were utterly deserted; indeed it was hardly likely that any one would have chosen that time of night to wander *there*, of all places in the world. Then I hastened with my burden to the lime-pit in the neighbourhood, and cast it in. And then I hid my lantern and my tools again, took off in wax an impress of the key to Mrs. Sapsea's monument, and hastened back to Durdles. I knew that the quick-lime in the pit would be true to its name and do its work of destruc-

tion speedily and well. And if, at any time, any remnant of Mrs. Sapsea's bones should be discovered, they would be female ones and could not be supposed to have any connection with the murder of Edwin Drood ; while the presence of a dead body in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin would be perfectly natural, and only its absence could excite surprise. Not even Durdles with all his knockings and his rappings could discover that it was the wrong one. Therefore my nephew, once laid in that abode, would remain there undisturbed until he, and I also, had long been dust and ashes. And the discovery of his dead body, unless I chose to reveal it, was an impossibility. The worst part of my work was accomplished, and well accomplished.

“It was high time that I arrived in the crypt. Durdles was beginning to move, and to utter unmeaning words. I laid the keys by his side, as if he had dropped them there, and began to pace up and down to warm myself, for my teeth were chattering. It was close upon two o'clock in the morning. I had been absent nearly two hours.

“Durdles came back to consciousness peevish and discontented. I got rid of him as speedily as possible, and regaining possession of my lantern and my tools, which I

should want once more, went home to rest after my labours. I had been greatly alarmed at first on coming out of the Cathedral to find that same hideous urchin in waiting for Durdles, but I discovered that he had only just arrived, and could not possibly have seen me, and so went back to the Gate House reassured.

“I could laugh now—so thankful was I to have the night behind me—at the remembrance of that foolish and unmeaning vision in the vault. If I were safe from living eyes, I had no occasion to fear dead ones. But I laughed noiselessly, for I was standing by the bedside of my sleeping nephew, and looking down upon him as he slept. That night, or the remainder of that night, I, too, enjoyed sound and refreshing sleep, and when I woke I felt almost like a new-born man for very lightness.

“It was close upon Christmas Eve, and upon the evening of that day my nephew was to die. I had made sure long before, that there was no chance, not the remotest, of the betrothal being dissolved, and I saw them myself renew their vows with a tender kiss. More tenderly, so it seemed to me, than they had ever kissed. My comfort was, that it was for the last time.

“My nephew and young Mr. Landless, as you know, met to dine at my house on Christmas Eve. They met cordially, and each did his utmost to preserve that cordiality until the end. Nothing whatever occurred to disturb the harmony. I played and sang to them, at their request, until at last we all sat silent, and listened to the fierce play of the elements out of doors. The play had risen into fury when Mr. Neville rose to go. There was a wild cry in the air as the angry wind lashed it, and the trees shook and trembled at witnessing the conflict.

“I proposed that the two young people should go down to the river together, and contemplate the grandeur of the storm. They did so; and during their absence I made my preparations. In a very short time, my nephew returned alone. I was waiting for him in the gateway.

“‘Is that you, Ned?’ I said, as he entered it.

“‘Yes, Jack. Why? What are you doing here in this awful draught?’

“‘Waiting for you, dear boy.’

“‘Mercy on us, Jack! You didn’t suppose that the wind would carry me away bodily, did you? Not but what it tried to do so.’

“‘I want to show you something, Ned.’

“ ‘Then let’s go upstairs and see it, Jack, for I’m nearly frozen.’

“ ‘It is in the churchyard.’

“ ‘Then, if you please, Jack, I will see it to-morrow, or if it can’t be seen then, will be satisfied to go without seeing it. No sight, however wonderful, could please me better now than a roaring fire.’

“ ‘To please me, Ned; I promise you that it will surprise you.’

“ ‘What a tiresome old Jack you are! Well, I suppose I must go with you. But for all you pretend to make so much of me, I know who is master. You always end, you old tyrant! in making me do what you wish.’

“ He spoke these last words half pettishly, half playfully, looking, nevertheless, wistfully into my face to see if he had offended me. His face was turned towards the lantern on one side of the archway, so that I could see it plainly. Well for him, or ill for him, that he could not see mine.

“ For my blood was boiling hot and madly within me, suffusing my face with burning colour, and my restless hands were itching to lay him low. This delay, occasioned by his unexpected opposition, irritated me to death.

“ ‘Come,’ I said, hoarsely.

“ ‘Just one moment, Jack. I really must run upstairs and take a drop of that mixture you brewed for us this evening. The wind, roaring so fiercely, has got down into my stomach I do believe, and is playing the very deuce there. Go on before; I shall overtake you in a minute.’

“ ‘To have lost sight of him, for ever so short a time, would have been more than I could endure. Grasping him by the shoulder with one hand, I took a small flask of brandy out of my pocket with the other (I always carried it with me on account of a sort of fainting attack, to which I was subject), and gave it to him.

“ ‘We must make haste,’ I said, ‘or we shall be too late. Take a drop of this. We shall have seen what I want to show you in another minute, and if you still feel the need of it, I will brew you any amount of the mixture on our return.’

“ He put the flask to his lips; then transferred it to his own pocket.

“ ‘I shall want another sip in the churchyard,’ he said, ‘since you will take me there.’

“ That flask lies buried with him in Mrs. Sapsea’s coffin, for I forgot it afterwards.

“ I almost dragged him forward. As we passed out from under the gateway, the wind

rushed to meet us, frantically strove to separate us, and shrieked—so I fancied—in wild despair at failing. We heard it crash the glass of the lantern behind us, by the light of which I had seen his face for the last time, and it went out—as the light of his life would soon go out, for ever.

“My nephew seemed bewildered by the crash and roar, and clung to me as a terrified child might have done. I fancy he spoke, or tried to speak, but the angry wind seized the words he uttered, or would have uttered, and scattered them far and wide.

“When we got under the shadow of the Cathedral, on that side where the churchyard lay, we were sheltered from the extreme fury of the wind, and could speak and breathe again. My time was come.

“‘Go on a step, Ned, and I will show it you.’

“He answered, laughing—

“‘All right, Jack, but if it isn’t well worth the trouble we have had, see if I don’t pay you out, old chap.’

“Those were the last words I heard him speak. The very last words he ever would speak in this world. The next moment I had flung a noose around his neck, with a skilful and steady hand, and drawn it close and

tight. He neither struggled nor cried out, but fell dull and heavy like a stone.

“I never could have thought any one could have been killed so easily. What a miserable thing is the breath of life in our nostrils! Another breath can quench it. I stooped down, and took him in my arms. He was warm, of course, but motionless and dead. I must have broken something in his neck, I suppose, by the suddenness and sharpness of the pull. But he was dead: there was no doubt about that, and I must make haste to bury him. Any moment might bring discovery. I could only breathe freely when I knew him in the coffin I had prepared for him.

“We were close to Mrs. Sapsea’s monument. This time I had no difficulty in opening it, and found all as I had left it.

“I laid him in the coffin; first, for a reason I had, taking off his watch and his shirt pin. He fitted it to perfection. I was just about to fasten down the lid, when, for the second time, I had a renewal of that strange vision which had appeared to me before in the vault. I saw in the coffin, not my nephew, whom I had just laid there, but Mrs. Sapsea again. I saw the dead eyes open in the shrunken and shrivelled face, I saw the dead mouth move, as if uttering words. And my heart once

more gave one fierce bound ; then stood still to listen.

“ It stood still so long, that I became unconscious. When I came to myself, I was icy cold, and my hands were so numbed that I had hardly strength to screw down the coffin lid, and make it firm and sure. But at last my task was ended, and I was a free man. I had carefully avoided looking again into the coffin for fear of another repetition of the vision, which I knew would have unmanned me.

“ I left the vault, exactly to all outward appearance, as I had first found it. It would probably only be re-entered when, in the course of nature, Mr. Sapsea should be gathered to his fathers. How astonished the pompous idiot would have been could he have imagined who would be his neighbour !

“ The wind seemed as desirous to keep me in the vault as I had been to bring my nephew there. I had quite a struggle to get out, but I conquered and subdued the wind, as man always can the elements, locked the door for the last time, and went back to the Gate House alone.

“ I warmed myself inside and out, for I was chilled to the bone, and then, though the storm still raged furious, I went out again,

taking the key (a new one, made from the impress in wax) and Edwin's watch and pin with me. I might have left them also in the coffin, which would have been the last place where they would have been sought, but that I wanted them to play another part. I wished the world to make sure that Edwin had been murdered, and also I wished to throw suspicion upon your young Indian. There would be no chance of my nephew's having absconded, if his watch and pin should be found, as I meant them to be; and your young man, who had ventured to cast an eye of love upon my choice, must be rendered powerless to ever win her. I cast, therefore, the key into a deep part of the river, and the watch and pin into a spot where I hoped they might be found. You know the rest, Mr. Chrisparkle, and if you wonder, as perhaps you do, how it is that I should remember even the smallest details, even to the conversation with my nephew, so accurately, do as I have done, and you will find that the difficulty—the only difficulty—is to forget.”

As he ended thus abruptly, the prisoner turned his back upon the Minor Canon, as if he had done with him and with the world from this time forward. All life and animation died out of his face, his eye lost its fire,

and as he crouched down again upon the bed on which he was sitting, he had more the look of a stunned animal than of a human being, so completely and heavily he sank into lethargy.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE RESURRECTION.

MR. CHRISPARKLE had been listening to the story of the prisoner, ever since the mention of Mrs. Sapsea's monument, with a feeling of intense and bewildering amaze. He had not interrupted its progress once since that period, but sat with bowed head, hearing every word which John Jasper uttered, and not only mechanically hearing, but understanding it too, yet with an impression, growing as the story proceeded, that it was too wild and improbable to be true, but must be a vision of the narrator. And even in the midst of this, an inward voice seemed to be saying to him, constantly,—so constantly, that the repetition grew almost unbearable :

“Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Who can reconcile these two facts, if facts they are?” And again : “Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. What is the wild meaning of this ?” And again, ditto, ditto, *ad infinitum*, ending at last with : “I dare not think any

more about this at present, or I shall go distracted."

Yet, notwithstanding this firm resolve, he was still thinking about it when the story was concluded (that story which he found so wildly improbable, and yet which he could have repeated again, word for word, as if he had lived, instead of only heard it) and was still thinking about it when the gaoler, pre-announced by the rattling of his cruel keys, turned the key of this particular cell in the rusty lock, and came to summon him.

"You've been a long time over your time, sir," said the gaoler, "but as I heerd him, (with a rattle of his keys towards the bed) a talking constant, and as it was you, sir, I took the liberty of closing a hi, and let the time be hanged."

This last word sounded so unpleasantly suggestive in the prison, that even the gaoler felt it. Following, therefore, the metaphorical closing of the eye, with the literal one, he managed with the other organ of vision, and with remarkable ingenuity, to glance respectfully at the Minor Canon, and significantly at the prisoner.

"You'll be glad enough to get out into the fresh hair," he continued, energetically re-opening the closed eye and looking about

him as if he feared he had gone too far with his experiment, and that his eyes might have lost the power of ever working together in unison, "the hatmosphere of the cells brings down the prisoners wonderful, and it ain't a bit wonderful that it should affect you, sir. He's quiet now, as quiet as a lamb," bringing again one eye to bear upon John Jasper, who still sat upon the bedstead, as rigid and unlike life, as if he were dead, "but he've got the prison ager for all that; there's a many on em gets it, and he, in partickler, has his hot and cold fits, reglar. He was so obstreperous, that we had to put him in irons, though it ain't customary, unless they're wiolent, afore the trial, and I popped on the handcuffs before you come, to make all safe and sure, you see."

The Minor Canon looked uneasily at the prisoner, and slightly shook his head. Then, staggering, rather than rising, to his feet, he indicated that he was ready.

"Bless you, sir," said the gaoler, with a chuckle (he had caught the deprecatory glance of the clergyman, and fully understood its import) "he ain't a listening to me. He's too far gone for that; he's as good as dead now, and in a few short weeks he'll be as bad as it. Now, sir, if you'll have the goodness."

The Rev. Septimus looked back upon John Jasper, sad and deeply troubled. Where were all his hopes of rescuing a brand from the burning? Was it possible to try once more? No, it was not possible.

He followed the gaoler out through the chilly stone passages, into the fresh air, leaving John Jasper safely locked up in the solitude of his cell, but closely pursued by the importunate riddle which he had found there, and which would not be left behind; my first, Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin; my second, Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty; my whole, what? and—"I must put off the solving of this to a moment when my mind is clearer and less agitated, for now it is making me light-headed."

He was much longer on the road than his usual brisk trot would have taken him, for the puzzle was loud of voice, and shamelessly protruded itself on his attention; however, he got to Minor Canon Corner at last, where he found the china shepherdess weeping but resigned, and giving the doctor, who had just come downstairs from his daily visit to Rosa, minute and precise instructions concerning her funeral, which would immediately become necessary when the fatal news she was

expecting should arrive. "I do not blame the dear, imprudent, conscientious boy," she was saying, pathetically, and with deep emotion, as her son softly opened the dining-room door, "far be it from me so to do. I only request you, doctor, as my valued and trusted friend, to arrange that we may be laid together side by side in one grave, and—" here she broke off with a cry of delight at the sight of her beloved son, and rushed into his arms. Crying, laughing, scolding, in one breath, she implored him—absolutely refusing to believe that he could have escaped quite whole and sound—to hide nothing from the mother who loved him, but to tell her,—he should see that she had fortitude to bear it,—how and where he was injured? and let the doctor, whom she had detained for the purpose, examine and bind up the wounds. At which her son, never in a less laughable mood, could not forbear smiling, and the doctor absolutely roared.

It was a little inconsistent of the china shepherdess, even when indulging most recklessly in her gloomy forebodings, to have provided such a substantial "support" as her son found waiting for him. Persisting in regarding him as a sort of prodigal son, although he had been away only upon an

errand of mercy, and by no means "wasting his substance in riotous living," she had slain her fatted calf, and, in absolute forgetfulness of the long winter before them, had remorselessly broken open pots of her daintiest preserves, pine apple and peach (her Sept always had a sweet tooth), fetched up with her own nervously twitching hands, and watered with her tears, a bottle of the choicest wine their modest little cellar could provide, and in short showed herself extravagant to an unprecedented degree. Cook's opinion, invariably severely uttered in the kitchen after every difference of opinion between her and the mistress as to how many eggs should be used for the pudding, or how much butter for the pastry; the former being always for the greater, and the latter for the less quantity—to the effect: "I won't go so fur as to call the missus miserly; no, Mary, not so fur as that, I won't go; nor yet mean; but if I says the missus is close, Mary, I think no one won't deny that sich she is," must, for this evening at all events, have been declared to be vilest calumny.

The festive board spread, and the hero of the occasion installed at the head of it, the doctor on one side, and Helena on the other, (Rosa was sound asleep, and her patient nurse

had been therefore persuaded to leave her), the fluttering little mother seated herself at the foot, to pour out tea for herself and Helena, to superintend the whole, and to glow with pleasure at the certainty that her boy, upon whom her rapturous gaze rested incessantly, was really uninjured, that though he had been lost, he was found; while the good things, particularly those in the neighbourhood of the doctor, disappeared as if by magic, and even Helena showed no disposition to despise them, plying her knife and fork as she had never plied them before in Minor Canon Corner. How handsome she was, too; how radiant and happy! Her brother's stained name washed white again; the china shepherdess, all gentleness and love; Rosa getting strong and well; the grim doctor, smilingly regarding her as her friend; and *his* presence, greatest joy of all,—what wonder that her dark eyes glowed with pleasure; that her dusky cheek bloomed in warmest beauty; that her face, when turned in one direction, softened into absolute loveliness. Two pairs of eyes watched her; one pair seemed to say: "How brilliantly handsome the girl is!" The other: "How I love her!" The old doctor made a shrewd guess that evening, and he guessed right.

Yet, even in the midst of this joyous circle, and this happy home, the Minor Canon was grave and silent; only brightening, involuntarily, when his eyes rested with ineffable tenderness upon the girl at his side.

Although with ready tact, and as if by mutual consent, they avoided all reference to the late interview in the gaol, the Revd. Septimus could not succeed in forgetting it. The awful riddle presented itself to be swallowed with the juicy steak; dimmed the sparkle of the wine; and destroyed even the flavour of the famous pine-apple preserve. It appeared to be hovering on the lips of the jovial doctor, although that sagacious medical man was only muttering under his breath: "Impolite a thing as it is to do in company, yet I'm sure I smell a rat, and: It's all up with Miss Dean."

But it did not quit the house with the doctor when the doctor went; and as Helena, with a gentle "Good-night," left the room to take up her old position by the side of her friend, it grew more importunate.

Nay, when he pleaded weariness, and went to bed, not even his mother (who came—as she had always done in his younger days, and did again to-night, because she couldn't help it—to tuck him up snugly, kiss and bless him) succeeded in banishing it.

From under his pillow it crept out in the darkness, and took up its station by his ear, repeating: "Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. Who can make head or tail of this?" and: "I must banish it with a strong effort, or it will haunt me all the night."

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The puzzled Collector of Rents left alone, on Mr. Chrisparkle's departure, with his doubts and uncertainties, soon came to one conclusion, to wit: that it was not only eminently egotistical, to occupy so much time—which might be devoted to other and better things—upon himself, and his feelings, but that he was eminently unfitted so to do.

"Not," added Mr. Grewgious, apologetically, "that I would mean to insinuate that the vice of selfishness is not quite as natural to me as to any other of my fellow-men—but as to coming to any definite result. The leading-up," continued Mr. Grewgious, with a dim recollection of long-forgotten algebraical studies, "from A and B to Z, or from Z, as unknown quantity, to A and B, as known ones, is quite beyond me. Let me, therefore," concluded Mr. Grewgious, with a smile,

“stick to my book-keeping, as within my narrow sphere, and abandon Z and the feelings of Mr. Hiram Grewgious, as beyond it and not really worth the trouble of clearing up, to their fate. In other words, let me abandon the theoretical, and stick to the practical.”

This settled, Mr. Grewgious began to look about him, with intent to find some other object upon which to concentrate his attention. Neville and Helena had not yet returned from their walk, and at first Mr. Grewgious thought he would go and meet them, accompany Helena to Minor Canon Corner, and, perhaps, get another glimpse of his pretty Rosa at her window.

Then he considered that to intrude himself upon the brother and sister, during the first transport of their joy, would be in decidedly bad taste, and he abandoned this intention.

“I will go,” he concluded finally, “and visit Mr. Sapsea, who is seriously ill, as I hear. (He had been introduced to that fallen monarch on the occasion when the Mayor had so brilliantly distinguished himself in the matter of poor Neville). A formal call is only what will be expected of me, although, (smoothing his smooth head in ludicrous dismay at the prospect), conscious how unfitted

I am to make it with the correctness which society demands—I would rather not.”

But a moment after, his conscience, severely pricking him, inquired with severity : if that were not an additional reason for doing it ? and in some tremor he hastily donned his hat, and drew on a pair of neatly-mended black-thread gloves.

“He may refuse to see me,” was first his consolation and then his reproach.

He was almost there, freshened and cheered by the walk in the bright, clear afternoon, when he suddenly remembered that conversation, never easy to him, would be a very pitfall on the present occasion, and he stopped, dismayed, to reflect, ere too late, what subjects he might venture to approach, and what he must carefully avoid.

He had heard of the popular excitement concerning Mrs. Sapsea’s ghost, and the consequent ignominious treatment which the unfortunate husband had received at the hands of his townspeople ; but he had not heard that the coffin of the deceased wife had been opened. Other and later excitement had so entirely absorbed the popular attention, that this had been almost forgotten.

“I must be very prudent,” thought Mr. Grewgious, as he ascended the steps to the

Mayor's house, sighing to think how imprudent he often was, but, fortunately ignorant of the near neighbourhood of two faded blue eyes, which could have borne witness to this fact.

Yet Miss Twinkleton watched him with a certain triumph, too, as she sat behind the window-curtains of her own special sitting-room in the Nuns' House.

"The decrees of Providence," the lady was saying, with a preliminary: "ha-hum," as if she fancied herself on her platform in "the apartment allotted to study," and catching herself up short, as if on the point of adding: "Young ladies—are invariably wise and just. When I regard with an unprejudiced eye, the movements—most remarkably awkward and unæsthetical, ha-hum!—of the individual ascending those honoured steps, I bow my head abashed (she was doing nothing of the kind, but craning her neck to see all she could of him) at the reflection that there *was* a time when he appeared to me not altogether undesirable. When I consider the enormous incongruity, of a lady, not yet wholly destitute of attractions, at the side of that ill-made and shambling figure, I comprehend how unfitting the arrangement would have been. (Here Miss Twinkleton rose to re-arrange

her cork-screw curls at a mirror, for the door had closed upon Mr. Grewgious.) When I realise how entirely the poetry of motion (taking a few steps to illustrate it) would have been mutilated in the company of that long-legged mons—”

At this point Miss Twinkleton’s feelings overcame her so completely that she was forced to succumb to them, covering her face at the same time to hide its traitorous hue.

When it reappeared again on the surface, a triumphant smile was wreathing the chiselled lips and a sound resembling “Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twink—” issued therefrom.

Then Miss T. hurried to the kitchen to superintend the making of a basin of beef tea for the fallen monarch of the town, and the reigning monarch of her virgin heart.

Mr. Sapsea, still confined to bed, graciously expressed his desire that Mr. Grewgious should visit him there; and the Collector of Rents, conscious what a poor figure he would inevitably make of himself, and ashamed to feel how sorry he was, submissively followed the maid conducting him.

The sight of the tremendous bed and the solemn figure reposing therein, tended still further to confuse and overawe him; and his progress towards the invalid being retarded

by two chairs and a bottle of wine on a table, which, as they persistently stood in the way, had to be successively knocked down and trampled on, he arrived at the bedside in such a pass of bodily and mental prostration that he was incapable of uttering a word, and stood, an image of despair and helpless dismay, before the Mayor.

That fallen Power, hollow-eyed and shrunken, pointed, with somewhat of his old stately manner, to a chair beside his bedstead, and harassed Mr. Grewgious actually found himself seated there at length, before it had shared the fate of its fellows.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," began his Honour.

Mr. Grewgious felt that Society expected him to reply that the pleasure was on his side; but this would have been such an unmitigated fib that it never got any further than his conscientious throat, where it stuck fast.

"You find me," continued the Mayor, no whit disconcerted, but rather gratified, by the silence and awkwardness of Mr. Grewgious, which he looked upon as an involuntary tribute to the Presence in which he found himself, "you find me abashed and laid low, and my enemies triumphing over me."

“Oh, no!” said Mr. Grewgious, forgetting himself in his sympathy, “don’t say that. Things are sure to clear up. I have good reason for saying that I am sure they will.”

“Let us not deny the facts,” continued Mr. Sapsea, with raised voice and increased solemnity, “let us not be guilty, as men and Englishmen, of turning our backs upon the Truth. If I had compared myself in the times past to a stately tree, spreading out wide branches over the community to protect and shield them from the storm, you might probably have admitted that the comparison was a just one.”

Mr. Grewgious, bowing his head low, smoothed it also.

“And shall I shrink now,” went on the Mayor, quite in a lively tone and struggling to sit up in bed, “from the acknowledgment that that same mighty tree, the ornament of the forest, has been struck by lightning, while braving the storm for others, and blasted in its pride. No, sir, I scorn to do it. It is a ruin whom you favour with your company. A ru—u—in! Though, perhaps, you may wish to add,—a majestic one.”

Mr. Grewgious, uttering some inarticulate sounds, might have been understood to imply that he did wish to add it.

It was astonishing to note the change which this uncontradicted self-laudation was producing in his Honour. He had looked old, shrivelled and shrunken, in the depths of his tremendous bed when the Collector of Rents had entered, but he seemed to fill out visibly before the visitor's eyes, like a collapsed air-cushion re-inflated.

“Like all men who, from gifts of Nature or circumstance, tower above the herd,” he continued, quite revived,—“might I trouble you to raise the pillow at my head—I have been at the disadvantage of being out of their range of vision, and consequently misunderstood and undervalued. Time, as you justly observe, will open their blinded eyes, and I shall have my niche in the Temple of Fame, but I may not live to see it. And now to turn to a subject which made me specially desirous of conversing with you this afternoon—you know that a terrible crime has been committed?”

“Certainly. You allude to the attempted suicide and murder by the river?”

“I allude to no such thing,” said the Mayor, severely. “Since that misguided young man quitted Cloisterham, and wantonly abandoned those opportunities for instruction which he might have profited by

(I had admitted him to the favour of my acquaintance, and my evening conversation), I immediately foresaw that he would—to put it familiarly—go to the Bad. He has gone to the Bad, as was to be expected, and has justified my predictions. But he has wholly ceased to interest me; for, the moment he left Cloisterham and his unheard-of privileges, I had done with him.”

“But perhaps you do not know,” said Mr. Grewgious, “that he is also accused of the murder of his nephew, Edwin Drood, and that there is almost overwhelming evidence against him.”

“I have heard that also,” responded the Mayor, “and it does not surprise me in the least. A young man, capable of casting away such inestimable advantages, is capable of anything. For the rest, spare me the details. They do not interest me. They are distasteful to me,” said his Honour.

“Then, of what crime are you speaking?”

“Of another, far more terrible. Of the sacrilegious violation of the sanctity of the tomb. Of the desecration of the coffin of my deceased wife.”

“What! you know that, too?” cried Mr. Grewgious, in amaze. “And we meant to keep it close for the present, it seems so im-

probable ; and yet the old woman swears it."

The Mayor regarded the speaker with severe displeasure.

"If," he began slowly, "you are speaking in those highly offensive terms of a most excellent and appreciative lady residing opposite, I beg to inform you that I cherish a warm regard for her, and a high opinion of her capacity for looking up, and cannot permit it, in my presence."

"Oh dear!" murmured Mr. Grewgious, who, quite innocent of any intention of offending, was all the more confounded. "I knew I should get into a mess. I ain't fit for society. It's like trying to walk on eggs and not breaking 'em—with my weight too. Bless me! (punishing his head without mercy for its incapacity) how couldn't I see that I was better out of it?"

"That ornament to her sex," continued the Mayor with righteous warmth, "truer to me in misfortune than in prosperity, prepares with her own scholastic hands, little accustomed to such uncongenial work, basins of delicious gruel, cups of the strongest beef tea, jellies and broths of surpassing quality, and requests my acceptance of these refreshments with a deference more refreshing still.

Therefore, I repeat, that a lady capable of such acts of spontaneous and reverential homage, is not a lady to be spoken of as 'an old woman,' and shall not be, in my presence."

The Mayor was now actually sitting up in bed, and, puffed out and pompous, was becoming alarmingly his old self again.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the unfortunate and horror-struck Collector of Rents, upon whom a light began to break, "you don't fancy I meant Miss Twinkleton, do you? I should never have dreamed of taking such a liberty. The very mere thought," said Mr. Grewgious, wiping his face and head with a pocket-handkerchief drawn out for that purpose, "makes me break out into a copious perspiration. I was referring to an old woman in London, who don't mind being called so; if she did, I shouldn't do it, I hope."

"Would you be so obliging," said the Mayor, accepting this apology with gracious condescension, "as to hand me my dressing-gown and slippers. There's a fire in my dressing-room, and I feel almost strong enough for an easy-chair."

Mr. Grewgious, anxious to assist, but still confused in his mind, handed the Mayor

successively, apparently under the impression that it was what was requested of him, a bootjack, a razor, a pair of trousers and a poker, and finally was obliged to ring the bell and obtain assistance.

When his Honour was comfortably established in his easy-chair, looking (so Mr. Grewgious thought) quite a man and Mayor again, Mr. Sapsea resumed the interrupted conversation.

"We were speaking of the desecration of the tomb of my late wife," he said. "It was opened, at my suggestion, in order to silence the voice of calumny, and then the awful discovery was made that it had been opened before and robbed of its contents."

"Opened? Already?" cried Mr. Grewgious. "How vain is every attempt of the murderer to hide his fatal secret! If the living are silent, the very stones cry out, and the dead bear witness to the crime. So you have had it done, while we were waiting!"

"I do not understand you, sir," said the Mayor, with a look which added, "and when I say I do not understand you, it is equivalent to saying that you are not to be understood."

But Mr. Grewgious went on hurriedly and eagerly, never heeding his Honour, and ap-

parently forgetting all his fears concerning the demands of society.

“Thus, even without our efforts at hunting him down, and tracking out the crime so cunningly concealed, it would have come to light. Wonderful as it appears that this should have been hidden from me, yet I can finish your narration, Mr. Sapsea. You found the corpse of your dead wife removed, and another laid in its place.”

The Mayor, alarmed at this sudden outburst on the part of his abashed and silent visitor, regarded him as if he feared he had shared the fate of Durdles, and had gone mad.

“I repeat, sir, that I do not understand you, and I fear you do not understand yourself. Whether the corpse was removed for anatomical purposes, or by an enemy, jealous of my renown, and seeking thus to throw suspicion on my honour, I cannot say—I have my eye on a villain capable of both these crimes—the fact is, as a very worthy witness has informed me, that the coffin contained no remains whatever of the late Mrs. Sapsea, but was empty.”

“Empty?”

“Empty.”

Each of the gentlemen looked aghast at

the other ; the one aghast at the unexpected news ; the other aghast at a vision conjured up by his fears.

“It *can't* have been empty,” began Mr. Grewgious, after an interval of alarmed silence, during which the Mayor had cautiously laid his hand upon the bell-rope by his side. “We agreed to keep it secret, till the time came, I and my helper ; but it *cannot* have been empty. The old woman said so, the old woman swore *he* had said so, in his visions.”

“You speak,” said the Mayor, tightening his grasp of the bell-rope, “in enigmas.”

“What is the meaning of this ?” enquired Mr. Grewgious, of the air, of the fire, of the window, and of a picture hanging over the mantel-piece, successively. As however, these insensate objects remained speechless, with the exception of the fire, which roared lustily, but incomprehensively, he applied finally to Mr. Sapsea (growing stony) and repeated for the fifth time—“What is the meaning of this ?” He was using the very words unconsciously, which Mr. Chrisparkle was uttering almost at the same moment.

“The meaning,” answered the Mayor, somewhat peevishly, and doubtful whether it would be wiser to ring or not, “is, that I

am still an invalid, and can't stand too long visits as yet—and when I say, the coffin was empty, I mean, of course, empty of anything expected to be found there. There was a ring—new to me, and hardly possible to have belonged to Mrs. Sapsea without my knowledge. To have supposed that ring to have been the property of Mrs. Sapsea, would have been to suppose Mrs. Sapsea capable of concealing anything from me, and an insult, not only to Mrs. Sapsea, but also to *me*, sir,” (irritably, as if Mr. Grewgious persisted in supposing it).

“May I see the ring?”

“I feel very weak,” said the Mayor, with a sudden relapse, “but if you will not be too long about it, you can do so. You will find it in that little drawer—third one from the top—of my secretary.”

What made Mr. Grewgious tremble and shake as if a storm wind had seized him? Why, even when he had found the right drawer, after repeated failures, did he hesitate to open it? Why, when he did so, did he show symptoms of such violent agitation? Perhaps Mr. Sapsea, with alarmed eyes upon him, might have been propounding these questions.

A little leather case, worn and old. A

ring—so small, that one fell instinctively into a muse, to think how slender must have been the finger that could wear it.

A ring! *Her* ring! Bringing back with a rush old days long past, but cherished still as most blessed memory of my youth. Oh, love, dead so many weary years; leaving behind only the hope of meeting thee in heaven, and daring, unreprieved, to love thee there! Oh little dead hand, now mouldering in the grave, yet once, when sporting this, so soft and fair! Oh, God, ever merciful, who gave me one never-to-be-forgotten glimpse into Thy Paradise, and endless longing to live worthy of such rich reward! With bowed heart and head, I acknowledge the wisdom of Thy decree and know that though Thou tookest my treasure, Thou hast restored and wilt restore it.

A ring! *Her* ring! Given back to life and light, and sparkling in the dancing fire-light like an emblem of immortality. Forgive these tears which will not be restrained; they are not tears of rebellion, O Lord! but of humblest submission to Thy decree, and seek to praise and glorify Thy name!

“I can identify this ring,” he said slowly, when the first burst of uncontrollable emotion had been suppressed, “but not now; I am

too affected—too deeply moved at the sight of it, to be able to collect my thoughts sufficiently to even wonder how the ring was found there, *alone*. Let me lay it for the present back again, where you laid it, till I can." And tremblingly smoothing his smooth head, Mr. Grewgious took leave of the astonished Mayor, quitting the room just as a servant-maid entered it, carrying a tray, on which stood a basin of smoking beef tea, that moment arrived with Miss Twinkleton's humblest compliments.

Mr. Grewgious never knew how he got back to his hotel, for his legs carried him thither without any conscious instruction from his mind. He was thinking of years long past, when he, an awkward, shambling lad, had first looked into a sweet face, and felt, in doing so, what heaven really was; he was recalling the time when the hope of attaining such a treasure had dawned upon him like a wonder too great to be possible, yet rapturously cherished while it lasted; he was enduring again the old agony, when the vain hope died out for ever; he was plodding again the dreary, dreary path of life without it; he was thinking how the first dim light which shone upon this dreary life, was the wish so to live as to have been worthy of

her, if God had willed it so ; he was thanking God that this light had grown and spread, not dazzling as the other, but calm and peaceful as twilight before the night comes, and the re-breaking of the day. And he knew that though the All-good and All-merciful had given man, for his earthly portion, mourning as well as gladness, sorrow as well as joy, yet that all His gifts were *good*.

On arriving at the “ Crozier,” he inquired, coming back from time past to time present, where Mr. Neville was ? and learned from the waiter that he had returned about an hour before, and being weary from his walk, had followed his sister’s earnest advice, and gone to lie down.

“ But there’s another young gent,” added the waiter, “ a waiting for you in the coffee-room, and is, at this moment, a pacing up and down, and a walking to and fro, like as if tired of it. And if it is your pleasure, sir, will you see the gentleman in your own room, for he wishes to speak to you in private ? ”

It was certainly not Mr. Grewgious’ pleasure to do so, but he seldom consulted *that* as to his actions, and he answered, wearily—

“ I suppose so,” adding, “ Is he a Cloisterham gentleman ? ”

“No, sir; from Lunnen, sir. Come down on business, sir.”

“A gentleman with bushy white hair?”

“No, sir; a young gent, with blue spectacles.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Mr. Grewgious, in a livelier tone, “my clerk from town. I hope there’s nothing amiss.”

“He hasn’t said there is, but he looks like thunder, and have rung at least ten times to ask if you was come: which ain’t the manners of a gentleman,” said the waiter, indignant at this presumption on the part of so inferior a human being, “and might a showed me, as he was only a clerk or something of that sort.”

“Bring him up to my room,” said Mr. Grewgious, without further comment, and in a few moments the *new* clerk, still called by that name to avoid confounding him with that lost genius and unity, Mr. Bazzard, stood before him.

“Take a chair, Mr. Brandis,” began Mr. Grewgious. “I hope nothing’s the matter. Yet stay, you are hungry and tired no doubt, let me order some refreshment for you first.”

But the young man came forward, until close to Mr. Grewgious, putting the strange and alarming inquiry—

“Do you know me, sir?”

There was something so new in the low and agitated voice—strange, and yet strangely familiar,—that the old man, whose nerves were still shaken, turned a shade paler, as he answered, trying to smile as if it were a joke—

“My senses are never very acute, and I have been alarmed and agitated just now, but unless they have quite deserted me, I think I do. Come, Mr. Brandis, if you have anything to communicate, either good or bad, out with it, and let me know the best or worst at once.”

“Look once more, sir, I beseech you. Has the sight of me never aroused in you the memory of another? Let me take off these disfiguring glasses. Do you know me *now*?”

As he raised his uncovered eyes, brimming over with tears, Mr. Grewgious trembled so violently that he was obliged to grasp a chair near him for support; but when he spoke, his voice was hard and cold, and cuttingly severe.

“I know *this*, sir, that you have been deceiving me who trusted in you; and that I am cruelly disappointed in you, therefore. I see, also, that your hair, which was dark as night, has changed its colour, and is brown. You have been disguising yourself for some

purpose, and disguise is false, sir. No honourable and honest man need take refuge in a lie."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," cried the young man, wildly, making a movement as if he would have flung himself on his knees before his master, which, however, Mr. Grewgious prevented him from doing, "hear me before you condemn! Oh, my benefactor! dear to me as if you were my father; whom I look up to and reverence next to God; try once more! Listen to the sound of my voice, so long purposely changed and altered. Look at my face, changed as if years had passed over it, instead of only months. Fancy me bright and young and happy, as I was before all my happiness and youth were blasted by a fearful crime. Take away in imagination this year's growth of beard, and imagine the face without it. Oh, Mr. Grewgious, it is true that I have assumed a new face and a new voice to blind you, but with no mean or base motive! You must, *must* know me, now."

"No, sir," returned the old man, drawing back and holding out both hands as if to repulse him, while every drop of blood vanished out of his shrunken cheeks, "I do *not* know you. What do you mean by frightening me? How do you dare to do it!"

“Then,” said the young man, more quietly, but with an accent of such intense sadness, that it struck on the tender heart of Mr. Grewgious like a sharp knife, “I must be changed far more awfully than I even feared, and might have spared myself the trouble of this unnecessary disguise; for, sir, though you do not know me, as sure as there is a God above us, I am Edwin Drood!”

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MR. CHRISPARKLE READS A LONG
MANUSCRIPT WITHOUT SPECTACLES.

A FEW days had elapsed since the unexpected and marvellous disclosure to Mr. Grewgious, and, after the first burst of incredulous surprise and even terror, on his reappearance, when everyone, even the most sanguine, had long abandoned all hope of his possible escape, the *new* Edwin Drood (so different from the old one, that it seemed as natural to prefix this adjective to his name as if he had really been another) was gradually beginning to be believed in.

Yet, but for the evidence of the ring and the evidence of the desecrated tomb of the late Mrs. Sapsea, everybody, not excepting Mr. Grewgious, might have been inclined to regard him as a cunning impostor, who, having in his position as clerk to the Collector of Rents obtained possession of the particulars of this sad family drama, had resolved to make them a means of base profit to himself.

For Mr. Chrisparkle, up to the present

time, had related no particulars of the murderer's confession, and had resolved not to do so until the disclosure should be sanctioned by the result of the trial.

Mr. Grewgious had refused to hear any detailed account of the escape until Mr. Chrisparkle could be present as one of the auditors, declaring that his poor head would not be able to support it alone; therefore, one evening, a few days later, the Minor Canon and the old man sat down together in the cozy book-room, in Minor Canon Corner, to peruse a manuscript which the former clerk had put into his employer's hand: begging him to excuse his being present at the interview, for the remembrance of all he had passed through never failed to completely upset him, even now. He had written it out, he added, further, during the last few days in London, because the necessity of keeping silence for his uncle's sake had been changed, by altered circumstances, into a necessity to disclose the real facts of the case, and he had felt he could do it more efficiently in this manner.

He had also implored the old man to refer to past events, in his hearing, as little as possible; although if considered necessary, he could still further prove his identity by

minute descriptions of places and persons, impossible for an impostor to know.

Then Mr. Chrisparkle, previously narrating to Mr. Grewgious such outline of the prisoner's confession as might be useful in comparing the accuracy of the two narrations, and laying aside the spectacles, with which his mother had provided him, for why injure his eyes without occasion? began to read as follows:—

* * * * *

“I need go no further back in this narrative of my wonderful and almost miraculous escape from death and the grave, than to the evening before the day I was missed, to last Christmas Eve.

“Hardly one full year, and yet time enough to have made me such a different being to what I was, that I fancy sometimes I must have dreamed the past, and that I—the I, who write these words—can never really have been the light-hearted, careless, giddy boy whom the world knew as Edwin Drood.

“Will the world believe me, when I tell them that I was he, or will it (terrible fear which appals me, not for myself, for God knows that I suffer as much in resuming the

old name as I did in losing it, but because the certainty of my being alive, is the only means of saving him, my uncle, from the gallows)—will it reject my claim, and damn me as an impostor?

“Only one short year, and yet it might be ages, so far, far back must I go, when I would return to the thoughtless days of my youth, and the last evening of my life, as it was. I have read somewhere of a man, a doctor, I believe, who fell asleep only ten minutes, by his watch, and who dreamed in that time that he married; had children; saw them grow up into men and women; became a grandfather; lived a long life, in short, in *ten minutes*. I slept for many weary months, and dreamed enough, I am sure, to have long since attained the allotted age of threescore years and ten.

“What is age, after all? and what do we mean by old and young? Is not suffering, with its attendant experience, age? Is not happiness, fresh and bright, always young? There are worn out mothers of families, only two or three and twenty years of age; there are young men about town who have seen fifty or sixty summers, and are gay boys still.

“I raise my head to look into the glass

opposite, and see a face reflected back, familiar to me now, but which, when I first saw it, six months ago, made me turn round suddenly to see what stranger was standing behind me. A face, pale, hollow-eyed, and middle-aged; somewhat lined, as if forty years had passed over it, and left no uncertain footmarks behind.

“Combed low over the troubled forehead, clusters bright brown hair, lit up with a touch of sunshine (I have washed away the black dye, you understand); this and the fresh growth of beard, which frames in the worn face, and covers the upper lip, are the only visible tokens of youth left me, and of brightness. Take away ten years, therefore, in deference to this legacy, and there remain thirty. A man, certainly not much under thirty years, and aged for his time of life. That is the final verdict, after careful scrutiny. No one would doubt it.

“Yet the register of Edwin Drood’s birth is only twenty-one years old, and the clerk who wrote it, and the witnesses thereof, are living still and could prove its correctness. Nevertheless, for all that, I am Edwin Drood, or rather was—*was*.

“Let me return to that evening when I was destined to die, and yet to live—a strange

anomaly. I cannot quite understand it myself, and if others cannot either, it will not be surprising.

“My uncle, Mr. John Jasper, had invited me and young Mr. Landless to a batchelor’s dinner in the Gate House, for the purpose of our becoming reconciled; and also of showing to the world, which (that is to say, that atom of the world, comprehended in Cloisterham) had taken a very absurd interest in our foolish quarrel, that we were reconciled.

“I did not like Mr. Landless; not even without the particular reason which afterwards made us almost natural enemies, because his nature was so opposed to my own, and so superior, as I could not but acknowledge, that I fear I was jealous. He was about the same age as myself, and yet so different; so grave, earnest, and manly that I felt quite at a disadvantage beside him, and for the first time in my life confessed myself the “stupid boy,” that Rosa, so often to my displeasure, called me, and which I intended, once and for all, sternly to prohibit, when our union had removed me from the subordinate position of lover into the superior one of the husband, whom it was her bounden duty to obey. I meant to be kind and indulgent to my pretty wife, but to show her, in good time,

who was to be master; and I had no intention of putting up then with her 'nonsense,' as I called it, as I had been obliged to put up with it, during our unromantic courtship.

"Ah me! when I think of my folly, and to what depths of misery it might have brought us—misery even worse than that I suffer now—but for the courage, energy, and noble nature of the pretty little creature whom I, in my arrogance, considered so inferior to me, yet who, upon an eminence far above, had been quietly reading and understanding every foolish purpose of my foolish heart, I am so ashamed of the boy, whose name I must assume again, that it increases my dislike to do it.

"And here was this young fellow, treated by every one with marked respect; spoken to as 'Mr. Landless' and 'Mr. Neville,' while I was only 'young Drood,' or 'Eddy,' or 'Ned,' or idiot and booby, perhaps, behind my back, if I did but know it. Just at the very time, too, when I would have wished to show a polish, equal to those of my brightly-polished leather boots, bought to satisfy Rosa, and which glared at me, as my downcast eyes rested there in despair at my fancied ignominy, as if they were imper-

tinently pointing out to me the contrast between my dullness and their brilliancy.

“For, the stately figure, dark beauty, and brilliant eyes of the sister of this young man had already made so deep an impression on me, that I felt an intense desire to appear at my best, instead of, as I was conscious of doing, at my very worst.

“As I sat opening and shutting Miss Twinkleton’s fan, apparently my thoughtless self, and treated by everybody (so I imagined) exactly as Jack often treated me: like a fortunate fellow who had won the first prize in a lottery, without, of course, ever having done anything to deserve it, I was seized with an almost irresistible impulse to fling the fan into the face of that stuck-up and coxcomb brother who so coolly put me aside, as if, being the winner of the first prize, I could be no possible competitor for the second.

“I dare say there are many men, and women too, who, having won something rare and beautiful, are apt to regard it with an indifferent eye, as having lost its value through possession. Such was the case with me. I was fully aware that my lovely betrothed was a jewel beyond price; but it was *mine*, and had been mine so long that I had grown

accustomed to its beauty, even fancied I could detect flaws in it, and was half weary of what I had attained without any trouble.

“And might I not dare to admire another? Why he, the coxcomb brother, was casting looks of fiery admiration at *my* possession, and *I* didn’t mind.

“No! the reason which Cloisterham assigned for it was not the reason why I did not like Mr. Landless. Rosa was so certainly mine, that it only gratified my vanity to see her admired. Just as if she were a valuable jewel, of which I was the possessor and which I could feign to regard with indifference, although I was willing to acknowledge that she would make a pretty ornament, with the sharp corners, which wounded me, rounded off, and set in our married home, of which I was to be lord, and she the dutiful wife.

“So, in my way, and shown according to my nature, which was not explosive like his, I was quite as full of passionate dislike towards Mr. Landless, as he towards me; and I wish to state emphatically, now, with the knowledge of the suffering he has endured since then brought forcibly home to me, that I was the provocator in the quarrel between us; and that though his hot and fiery disposition may have blazed up with

peculiar readiness at the first contact with the match I lit, yet I was the one to provoke the explosion, and that I humbly pray him to forgive me, as I have prayed God to do so, although I can never forgive myself.

“Mr. Grewgious—you to whom I address these pages—my noble benefactor ! my truest friend ! you were the first to open my blinded eyes, and show me what love, true love towards a chosen wife, ought to be. Not that I comprehended clearly, at first ; yet like the blind man in the New Testament, who saw men as trees walking, I tremblingly felt that I was trifling on the verge of an abyss, and that a few more heedless steps might be fatal to both Rosa and myself. And if I know now, that which I dimly felt then, what true love is, the agony of soul the knowledge has brought me, may expiate perhaps in some measure for my reckless folly.

“From your honoured lips, (inspired almost as it seems to me ; or had you discovered the real nature of the chains, already galling, which bound us, two young things ?—young enough to have aroused sincere pity for the fate impending), I learned in what hallowed light a man ought to regard the woman he would make his wife. Not as an ornament for himself, or for his house ; not as a toy to

play with, or to cast aside heedlessly, when tired of; not as a child to be loved and caressed, petted or punished, as the case may be; not as his housekeeper, and possible mother of his children—his absolute property anyway, and to be treated ill or well, according to his sovereign pleasure.—Ah! as none of these, or either misery, absolute misery, must be the inevitable result, or cool indifference, almost sadder still. As the light of his life he must regard her, sent by heaven to brighten the dull round of earthly duties, and make them not only bearable, but absolutely pleasurable, for the love of her. As the completion of himself, the other half which makes him first into a whole. No angel, for an angel would not suit his nature, but a human being like himself; and I wonder, as I write, at the marvellous stupidity which would set the sexes in opposition, or venture to compare them, when it was so evidently the intention of the Creator that the one should be the completion of the other.

“But I am digressing, and am almost inclined to eradicate the last paragraph, as perhaps partaking somewhat of the crudeness natural to a youth who, though feeling so old—so old, has been an inmate of the world he criticises, only, after all, twenty-one years.

Yet the solitariness of my present life is favourable to reflection, and I do reflect, and have reflected much, more than is healthful, probably.

“ You will have heard an account, no doubt, of my last interview with Rosa, for later events would impose on her the necessity of revealing it. I had gone to her with more real humility than I had ever felt before, I think, and yet with a half-feeling of pride too, that I should be the one to open her eyes, as you had opened mine.

“ Alas for my foolish vanity, doomed to so complete a humiliation ! Before I had time to begin my exposition and to consult with her as to whether, after all, we loved each other sufficiently to venture upon a life together, she was speaking to me, and with no uncertain sound. She, whom I had looked upon as a pretty toy, almost incapable of earnest thought,—she, with no one to help her, had been entertaining the same doubts for many months, to which my foolish brain had only just given access, through the agency of another.

“ I acceded to her proposition that we should dissolve our engagement ; how could I do otherwise, with my own newly aroused doubts to back her up ? though with a heavy

heart. I felt so deeply grieved, that it surprised me myself. I suppose I had sense enough to feel that I had not only lost a beautiful jewel, but a loving woman, the depths of whose generous and earnest nature I had never thought of sounding.

“Therefore, I was no longer angry with young Mr. Landless, or resented his mean opinion of one, who had sunk so low in his own estimation, as to feel fully sensible that he deserved it. And as the face of his beautiful sister rose vividly before my imagination, I almost cherished a wish to become his friend, and thus pave my way towards the winning of the second prize, now that I had lost the first.”

Mr. Grewgious, listening with rapt attention, was surprised to see the Minor Canon suddenly lay down the manuscript and energetically and almost angrily attack the waning fire. Perhaps the clergyman's gentle heart was wounded and mortified at hearing, for the second time, his beautiful choice spoken of as an inferior prize; perhaps some spark of latent jealousy was fanned into action, by this reference to her in connection with another. But the momentary irritation faded and gave place to a look and smile of happy confidence, and before the Collector of Rents

had had quite time to screw his eyes into the right focus for observing him, he had resumed his reading.

“ Yet, notwithstanding this new fancy, my sad heart told me that no woman could quite replace my pretty Rosa; and my feet, sore with the rough walking in the valley of humiliation, grew impatient to carry me away out of dull Cloisterham, where the pain was most acute. That Christmas Eve I said good-by to it in imagination, and shed some of the bitterest tears I had ever shed till then. My heart was heavy with gloomy forebodings, as though I were destined never to see the old familiar place again. I did not know that it was not Cloisterham I was going to lose, but my own identity.

“ The dinner was a dull affair enough. Mr. Landless and I had met with every appearance of frank cordiality before Jack joined us. It was well he did, not that there was any danger of our quarrelling again—we were both too low spirited for that, he as well as I—but to raise our spirits which, after the first spasmodic effort at cheerfulness, were sinking fast again. I don’t know what was the matter with him, but I could not help remembering with a sharp pang of jealousy, the first pang I had ever felt from that source,

and now I had no right whatever to feel it—that if I was free to cultivate the acquaintance of his sister, he was also free to make love to Rosa; and wondering, if he would have the infernal impudence to do it.

“My sadness, during the progress of the meal, seemed to undergo a sort of fermenting process, and to be gathering into anger, rapidly. Not particularly with Mr. Landless. With everybody, myself at the head. What a sheep’s noddle I possessed! What a blundering fool I was! Such were the compliments I showered upon myself incessantly and unmercifully. I wished I had been a boy again, and that somebody would give me a sound and vigorous flogging. I so richly deserved it, that I almost longed to suffer the pain and humiliation. The smart of the body might act as a counter-irritant to the smart of the mind, and do me no end of good.

“But unfortunately there was no one possessing authority enough over me to try this remedy, and I went on getting angry with every one in turn. There were Mr. and Mrs. Tope, she one beam of horrible congratulation on the nearness of what was never to be; he coarse enough to whisper in my ear, as he handed me the potatoes, ‘I’ve a promised Mrs. Tope a new gownd for the occasion, and

I don't grudge it, Mr. Edwin.' I could have knocked him down upon the spot, but, restraining myself, only refused potatoes with a sharpness that must have brought him to his senses, or, at any rate, to a sense of his position.

"There was Jack, too, so remarkably lively and gay, that I nearly worked myself into believing he did it to insult me. But as I saw in his face, turned towards me lovingly as ever, nothing but the well-known look of engrossing affection, I was so ashamed that I could have sobbed out like a naughty but penitent child—'Oh, Jack, for mercy's sake, fetch the thickest stick you've got in the house, and break it over my ungrateful back.'

"It was a gloomy dinner, in spite of all Jack's efforts to make it cheerful. I don't know whether it was a sort of reaction from the melancholy which had oppressed me all the day, or whether I was in the first stage of an illness, as I have sometimes thought since, but even as the elements out of doors began to rise into fury, so my whole nature, body and spirit, did the same, and it was as much as I could do to repress all outward sign of the storm within me. As for Mr. Landless, his smiles were so forced and constrained that, even in my excited state, I

could almost 'have pitied him. It was an egregious mistake of Jack's, to bring two young men, with such a marked want of sympathy between them, together for a whole long evening. We ought to have shaken hands in the open street before the eyes of the populace, and then have gone our different ways.

“And even Jack's manner appeared to me unnatural on closer scrutiny. He was unusually gay: quite excited, in short. When, at last, he proposed my health, happiness, and prosperity, particularly with regard to a certain near event, which he need not further specify, I felt almost frightened at the look with which he accompanied his words. The scalding tears of anger and mortification rose to my eyes, and had to be swallowed with the ruby wine, which sickened me as if it had been my own heart's blood, and seemed to poison my life.

“I was heartily glad when the dinner was over, and Jack sat down to sing and play to us. It was a relief to escape for a time the steady, searching gaze, almost always resting on my face. I began to think he must, in some way or other, have heard of my loss. If I had not promised Rosa, I would have told him all about it, I thought; I so longed

for sympathy—I so longed to pour out my sorrows into a friendly ear. Anything would be better than this feeling of absolute loneliness; even severe reproof.

“The storm raged furiously all the evening, and when Mr. Landless took his leave, Jack proposed that I should go down to the river with him, in order to see to perfection the grandeur of it. I did not want to go, I am sure, for, though never before sensitive to atmospheric influence, this storm seemed to be raging all at me, and its echo resounding from my heart. And the wind, to my fancy (although I wasn’t a bit sentimental or fanciful from nature), *would* remind me of a drunken old woman, who had begged of me that afternoon, and who had told me in going away, that I might be thankful that my name wasn’t Ned, for Ned was in danger of his life. I had made light of it at the time, but I couldn’t make light of it now, because the wind, howling in my ear, kept saying, ‘And you are, are, *are* Ned; you know you are.’

“‘Oh, Rosa, Rosa,’ I sobbed, as, after having taken leave of Mr. Landless in Minor Canon Corner, I fought my way back to the Gate House, through the storm, now a perfect hurricane, ‘you never loved me, I know,

but I love you—I feel I do, now that all is over between us; and it is that which is making me so wicked and so utterly miserable.’

“‘You are, are, are, *are* Ned,’ so the wind kept shrieking, with a voice that would not be silenced, until I should like to have stopped my ears to keep out the sound. ‘You are, are, are, *are* Ned,’ as I turned in under the gateway where Jack was standing waiting for me.

“It was so imprudent of Jack to expose himself so unnecessarily, with his highly susceptible and delicate throat, that I was angry with him on his account at first. It was so aggravating of Jack to look after me as if I were a child who could not take care of myself that I was doubly angry with him on my account afterwards. I am afraid he must have noticed my irritation when I spoke, though I tried to subdue it.

“He wanted me to accompany him to the churchyard, to see, as I believed, some particular ravages which the storm had committed. I considered it purest folly, trembling with cold as I was already, even in my warm great coat and fur cap drawn down over my forehead, and opposed it as energetically as I could.

“I was tired to death of the storm, and

the monotonous warning of the wind, meaning nothing, of course, but not the less disagreeable to listen to. But I had to give way. Somehow or other I always had to give way to Jack when there was a difference between us: and I did so now as ever, though not without a feeling of resentment, and a touch of wonder at his almost passionate earnestness about such a trifle. But with no suspicion—no, not with a shadow of suspicion.

“‘You are, are, are, *are* Ned. You are, are, are, *are* Ned.’ So the wind again, as it struggled to tear us from one another. But I clung to Jack, and he held me tight, and we defied the wind together—the moaning, wailing, baffled wind which fled, shrieking wildly. But it came again, and again, and again. Alas! my ears were deaf to the meaning of the warning! If I had but heeded it, I might have saved him, my wretched uncle.

“How often God sends warning to those in danger, and how often they heedlessly neglect to profit thereby. How many sufferers, by what are called unforeseen events, must have been conscious of an inward voice, pointing out some possible danger, to which they turned persistently a deaf and careless ear.

“Looking back upon my own experience I seem to see the outstretched hand of God pointing ever towards the right and safe road, and know that disobedience to its behests, indifference to the inward warning, has more than once led me into terrible danger, and caused me endless suffering.

“When we reached the shelter of the Cathedral, Jack bade me go on ahead. I was feeling strangely unwell, with a restless heat and pain inside me, to which I had hitherto been a stranger. Suddenly (I had raised my head to look up at the Cathedral, fancying it was something connected with it that I was to see), all the pain and uneasy sense of fullness in my chest and stomach rushed to my head. I saw the Cathedral totter and reel; it was falling on me, and the next moment I lay dead beneath it.

“Then a long blank, followed by a troubled dream. Jack and I were playing together, boys again. We were playing at horses, and Jack, instead of putting the bit between my teeth, had tied it round my throat—so tight, so tight that my head ached frightfully, and I could hardly breathe. He laughed at my distress, mocking me, while I feebly put up my hand to loosen it.

“I was better now, though my head still

ached as if it would split, and my tongue seemed so much too large for my mouth, that I wondered feebly, how it managed to find room there. I was lying on my bed in the Gate House, and it was hard, and hurt me, and I could not remember, for the life of me, how I got there, and what had happened yesterday. I tried so hard to bring back to my remembrance what happened yesterday, that I thought my aching head would burst. It was something of importance, I knew. Ah! I remembered it at last. I had been with Jack to see something; but what, I could not recall. Something in the churchyard; oh dear! what was it in the churchyard?

“Good God! the Cathedral had been blown down upon me, and I was dead, or if not dead, buried under the ruins, and doomed to perish of starvation. The agony of this horrible thought gave me strength to rise and push away something hard and heavy covering me.

“There was light somewhere, a feeble light, like the dim light of a lantern. It was a lantern, and Jack was lying beside it, dead too, with his glassy eyes wide open, and an awful look of terror on his ghastly face. And I—I was lying in a coffin!

“The dread which every being, in whom is still the breath of life, feels instinctively for this last house of the dead, made me exert the little strength I had, to get out as soon as possible; and only when I had accomplished this, and stood beside Jack, who was quite unconscious, and who lay rigid and motionless, I began to reflect again.

“This was a vault, evidently, and we had both been cast into it by the fall of the Cathedral. But how did I come into the coffin? and who had put me there? I could not answer these questions, yet I avoided touching or rousing Jack, with a dread for which I could not account, and some impulse made me carefully replace the lid of the coffin before seeking means of egress; for I must get out of this horrible place, and hide myself from Jack’s glassy stare, which seemed to follow me menacingly, and note every movement I made.

“By the feeble light, I made out a few stone steps, up which I clambered, and the door above, yielding to my desperate thrust, opened, and let me out into the air. The storm had abated somewhat, though the wind was busy still, and began again as soon as it felt my presence, though using one different word. It said no more, ‘you are,’ but ‘you were, were Ned, you see.’

“By the fitful light of the moon, sometimes breaking through the driving clouds, I was able to make my way to a tall monument near at hand; for I was in the churchyard, and could see, to my amaze, that the Cathedral, sound and massive as ever, was still standing where it had stood before.

“Behind the monument grew a weeping ash, whose low branches swept the ground, and under this shelter I crept out of the biting, mocking wind, and pitiless storm. I was tolerably protected there, and I cowered down upon the cold, damp earth, waiting.

“Waiting. For what, I did not know. Not for Jack, certainly, whom I had left behind in the vault, dead or swooning, and of whom I dared not think, for something too horrible to be entertained was dawning upon me, in spite of myself. A vision so terrible, that the mere notion paralyzed me. But my head was turned towards the little door, hidden from me now, as was the moon, and all my faculties were absorbed in it, and in dread waiting for the next manifestation.

“I have no notion how long I waited, with my eyes upon the fatal door, now fully visible in the sharp light of the moon, now lost in darkness, deep and awful. It might have been an hour, it might have been only ten minutes. I was not capable of connected

thought, but crouched there waiting, waiting for what would follow.

“At last, at last, the door opened, and someone came out, carrying a lantern ; the lantern which I had seen burning in the vault.

“I felt it was Jack, before I saw him. The wind told me so as it sped past me to the attack. The lantern was extinguished in a moment, but the moon shone out bright again between the driving clouds, and showed me his face in brilliant light.

“Then I comprehended all, with the rapidity and intensity of a flash of lightning ; all, everything. I knew that Jack had meant to murder me. And I knew why.

“His face was sternly set, ghastly white, and awful to look upon, yet full of fierce triumph too. He was evidently entirely unconscious of my escape, for after quietly relocking the door, he looked up victoriously to the moon, his only witness, as he weened, and his lips parted to a smile.

“Such a smile ! Oh, heaven, it has haunted my dreams for one long year, and I fear the remembrance will never be effaced, but will haunt me to my dying day ! Not that it was distorted or horrible. It was grand almost ; like the fierce grandeur of a fallen angel, who has dared to cast down the gauntlet at

the feet of God. And, though triumphant, it was remarkable, too, for a sort of unutterable sadness, as if a long-borne agony had fashioned it so for ever.

“Agony ! oh, merciful God, what excruciating tortures must he have endured, to bring him to this ! And if I could only have told him in time, he might have been saved, he and I also.

“I understood now Rosa’s last look, that look of astonished and imploring inquiry. She had known that he loved her, and I, in my boyish folly and egotism, had never even imagined the possibility of such a thing. And yet I could have given her up to him, I could then.

“My heart ached with pity for the sufferings which my heedless tongue had inflicted, hundreds of times. How my thoughtless boastings must have lacerated and inflamed his bleeding wounds. And he had warned me, too, tried to warn me, tried to save me if he could. Oh, Jack ! Poor, poor Jack ! My thoughtless hands had bound him daily upon the rack, until the excruciating torture had driven him mad.

“Now, thank God upon my bended knees, for having spared him this terrible crime, and having saved me from being cut off in

my sins. I prayed as I had never prayed before, that He would support me with His gracious hand, and give me strength as long as I had need of it.

“ I scrambled to my feet again, and strove to think what was the best course to pursue. As I did so, I stumbled over the long ends of a silken scarf about my neck. With this he must have intended to strangle me and must have believed he had been successful.

“ I have thought since then, not at the time, for I was far too confused for quiet reflection, that this scarf must have got loosened somehow, when he was carrying me to the vault, and that in this way, I was enabled to breathe again. Perhaps my uncle took no particular pains to make certain of my death after I lost consciousness, knowing that he was bringing me to a place where escape would be impossible. So it would have been, but for his swoon which gave me time to fly. And yet I cannot believe that he could have contemplated the possibility of my being buried alive. No, I am sure, strange as it seems, that he believed me to be surely dead.

“ I was dressed in my usual walking costume, with my great coat on, and had even mechanically replaced on my head my fur

cap, which had been lying beside me in the coffin. But my watch was gone. I knew that ; because as I wondered what the time might be, I had, instinctively, out of purest habit, laid my hand upon the watch pocket in my waistcoat, though it was too dark to see, and had found it empty.

“ I must fly, fly while I had strength of body to do so—and I felt that would not be the case for long—for Jack’s sake, to save him from the consequences of his crime. I can truly say that, at that supreme moment, I thought as little of myself as of any one else but him ; and as old remembrances of what, and how much, he had been to me all my life, came back to me in a flood, I only longed to shield and rescue him, though I knew he would never know it.

“ I was chilled to the bone, from lying on the wet grass, and trembling from head to foot, and the bitter, wintry blast, tearing over me like a flood, seemed to be carrying away, little by little, the feeble remnants of the life remaining to me. Yet I dared not die, for then I should be powerless to save him, either from the punishment of the crime to which a passionate love had brought him, or, still worse, from the crime itself.

“ Suddenly, as if a ministering angel had

whispered it to me, inspired with heavenly pity for us both, I thought of the little flask of brandy, which Jack had given me to drink and warm myself with, before entering the churchyard. Had I got it by me still? If so, then it would impart new life, and reanimate my paralysed limbs, and we might both be saved,—for this confused thought always rose uppermost to my bewildered brain, and was the one influencing me so strongly, that as no one would succeed in discovering my body, no one would be able to charge my disappearance against Jack.

“Yes! I had it still in the pocket where I had placed it. Thank God, with all my heart and soul! I drank deep and long, and as the liquid fire circulated through every vein, rewarming and revivifying for a time, my powerless limbs regained some portion of their lost vigour, and were able to obey the commands which my brain had still sense and power to dictate.

“Where I should go? what road I should take? or whither my feet, left in this respect to their own free will, would carry me? were questions which I neither asked nor could have answered. Anywhere, far away from Cloisterham, away from Jack, away from Jack’s possible accusers! So I sped into

the night—the future as dark and overshadowed as the heaven above my head—the prospect before me as uncertain as the cruel and relentless, yet ever shifting wind.

“On, through darkness which might be felt; my progress one continual battle with the storm, many tongued, and which, when broken through, followed me, full of terrible forebodings. On, during the long night, of which so much remained, as to make me feel almost sure that I must have let the day pass me unawares. On, through the grey, reluctant morning, struggling against the necessity of appearing at all upon the scene. On, during the whole of the feeble, short-lived day, until darkness returned more friendly than the light, for it covered me up from the eyes of all men; and then, night again.

“At last I found myself looking curiously at myriads of shining stars, which looked back at me more cunningly yet less comprehensively than the stars above me in the now cloudless heaven, which were near at hand, and not far off and unattainable; and I said to myself, pressing my cold and trembling hand upon my burning forehead—‘I am quite calm and clear, and not mad as the lying wind would tell me if I would listen to

it. These are not God's eyes which can see into my heart like those out upon the roadside. They are as weak and extinguishable as the men who lit them, and cannot read my secret, though they wink so knowingly. They are the lights of a great city. This is London !'

"I have some vague idea that I entered a house here, rested, ate and drank. I cannot tell whether this is fact, or only fancy, induced perhaps by the body's natural craving for sustenance and repose. A similar notion haunts me, that a number of people came peering around me with curious eyes, all eager to learn my secret, and that I assured them over and over again with increasing earnestness, to believe that it was not I who murdered Jack ; that no power on earth could have induced me to commit so foul a crime ; that he was my only relative and kindest benefactor, and that I would have died a thousand times over, rather than have done it. They would not believe me, and I broke through them again, and with beating and agitated heart ran through the lighted streets, until I made sure that either they had not pursued me, or that I had distanced them. But both of these notions may have been only visions of my sick and excited brain.

“Then, I was in an omnibus—I have no idea how I got there—and rattling, rattling over the streets to—I knew not where. My head was aching horribly again, and the rattle of the vehicle seemed to go through it like a knife; but I did not mind that so long as it was carrying me further away from Jack. For, now I had quite settled in my own mind, in spite of my obstinate denial, that I had really murdered him, and that his avenging spirit was pursuing me incessantly.

“I might have been a whole night in the omnibus, so interminable appeared the time, and my head every minute was growing worse and worse, when the vehicle stopped, and the few passengers descended—I among them.

“There was one man who got out just before me, and, not knowing what else to do, I followed where he led.

“He went on in advance, through several quiet streets, while I, with great effort, kept pretty close behind him. The streets were absolutely deserted; no living soul to be seen but our two selves; he, my unconscious guide; I, following, I knew not whither. But for the lighted windows, here and there, it might have been a city of the dead.

“My strength to follow was nearly gone,

and still my leader went on apace. I could keep up with him no more, and when, at last, he turned a corner and disappeared, I stopped, from sheer want of ability to proceed.

“The rows of houses on either side began to reel and stagger, as I had fancied the Cathedral had done; the lighted lamps danced up and down like deceiving and mocking Will o’ the Wisps, and then began to fade. I raised my eyes in anguish to the stars in the calm night heaven—those stars which, on the lonely roadside, had appeared to me as the multitudinous eyes of an ever watching God—and commended my departing soul to its Creator.

“There are philosophers, who have eaten largely of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—more, perhaps, than any human being can digest—who tell us that the special interference of the Divine Author of our being, on behalf of one of His creatures, is, even for the Almighty, an absolute impossibility; who declare that those eternal laws which Nature is compelled to follow, are not to be put aside or neglected, even by their Maker. That not one of the millions of prayers addressed to God can be heeded or answered, and are absolutely in vain.

“These doctrines are so terrible that the

soul of a man in bodily or mental anguish instinctively refuses to believe in them, however convinced of their verity he may profess himself, when all goes well with him. As naturally as the child, understanding nothing of a mother's love, turns to that mother in pain or suffering, for comfort or healing ; so the grown-up child turns to its Father.

“ Would the instinct be so universal if it were founded on a lie ? I cannot believe it. I am sure that in that last extremity, when no man was near to help me, God heard my unspoken cry for succour, and upheld me with His Gracious Hand.

“ For, at that moment, when I had given up the unavailing struggle to save myself and save Jack, and was perforce succumbing to my terrible fate, my eye, nearly closing, was directed to a placard in a window near at hand, where I read the words quite plainly, although everything else was dim before my fading vision : ‘ Lodgings for a single gentleman.’

“ This was my haven—my shelter from the raging storm. The Hand of God was directing me, and I followed where He showed the way—followed trustingly though blindly.

“ I was enabled to climb the steps, ring the

bell, and make an application for the lodgings. A woman had opened the door in answer to my summons. I do not know what I said to her, or how I presented my case. The only sense or wish left me was to hide and rest; I either never thought about being ill, or must have fancied, that in seclusion and quiet, I should speedily recover. I remember seeing, or imagining, a look of indecision in her face—no wonder—and I pulled out my purse to show that I could pay. I had been saving up money in order to buy a particularly handsome present for Rosa, that last time I should see her before our wedding day, and had about a hundred pounds in notes and gold. I remember this; and that, all of a sudden, the woman and the furniture swayed to and fro, as the houses in the street had done; I put out my arms to save her, and after that I remember nothing more.

“Nothing more in reality, although the visions—the awful visions—that succeeded in rapid and bewildering succession, were as real to me as what I have narrated above; and I should never have been able to draw the line—an uncertain one always—between fact and fancy, but with the help of the noble woman who saved me.

“ I had found my haven ! Through months of sickness, this woman sat by my bedside, nursing me—the stranger, whose former life, for what she knew, might have been deeply stained with sin, as if I were her brother. Through the labyrinth of contending fancies, when, Heaven knows, what horrors I may have revealed ! she guided me, and tended me, back to life and reason.

“ Poor herself, with daily necessity to labour for daily bread, she plied her busy needle night and day, watching by my bedside. Sickly, weak, and delicate, she performed the labours of a giantess, and never gave way until success crowned her labours, and the sick man was rescued.

“ The first object my conscious eyes rested on was her gentle figure ; the first sound which I was capable of connecting with a cause, was the clicking of the never-flagging needle ; and the first welcome back to life shone out of her earnest, softly-beaming grey eyes. Heaven bless and reward her !

“ I was lying in a small room, scantily furnished with absolute necessities, but clean and exquisitely neat. On one side of my bed, daintily covered with a white counterpane, stood upon a table a little vase of spring violets, scenting the room with their fragrant

breath; on the other sat my ministering angel, her wonderful eyes, full of glad tears, fixed upon me.

“I felt so peaceful and so tranquil; weak and trustful as a baby, who troubles itself not one whit as to what is to become of it, but leaves every care to the never-failing love surrounding it. I had never known my mother, who had died when I was born, but I could have imagined that the loving eyes were hers, and that she had come down from heaven to guard her orphan boy.

“I regained my strength very, very slowly, in spite of the most careful nursing. The shock to the constitution—so the doctor said—had been too great to admit of rapid convalescence. Also, with returning strength of body came intolerable anguish of soul. I had been simply happy to live at first, without caring why.

“Now I remembered that I had nothing to live for, and no means of living, and wished that I had died. I dare say this inward conflict retarded my recovery. But Nature and a good constitution were not to be foiled. I was doomed to live, as I said to myself bitterly, and now that I had saved Jack, it would be far better if I died.

“But there was a powerful reason why I

dared not wilfully retard my progress towards health, and that was the necessity of being in a condition to provide for myself the means of sustenance, little as I cared to live. A hundred pounds may go a long way in careful hands, and carefully economised, but they cannot last for ever.

“I thought about that late enough, more shame for me! But when it occurred to me, and I sought for information from my gentle nurse, her evasive answers showed me the truth; and I at length extracted from her unwilling lips the confession that my money was nearly exhausted. Not that that would have made any difference to her—this good Samaritan. She would have worked for me and never let me know it; but there was another person in the house—her mother and the mistress of it—who had been unfavourable to the keeping me from the first, and who now gave me pretty plain intimation that it was time for me to go.

“I tried to get work, therefore—work which my previous education might have fitted me for (it was humiliating to feel, now that I had to bring my fancied accomplishments into the market, how little they were worth, and how very small a price could be paid for them), and I hunted up every likely

and unlikely advertisement for a worker (how few they were, compared to the number of competitors for them), and traversed the whole wide city—North, South, East and West—to answer them. Alas! without result, for if even the work were so simple as to leave no doubt of my ability to perform it, one thing always failed me: testimonials. Everything satisfactory up to this point, and my heart beating high with hope, the dreaded question would be the damper to totally extinguish it again: “To whom can you refer for a character?” And then the stereotype look of profound astonishment at the unmitigated impudence which could presume to hope to do without it.

“Then it was, sir, that I lighted upon your advertisement. Despair was gnawing at my vitals, and I had almost abandoned hope, or I should have put it aside without a moment’s thought. But, standing thus between two fires—the possible chance of your recognising me, and the certainty of want—I dared to contemplate the possibility of entering your service, and yet effectually blinding you as to who I really was. If I should be successful in my application, and you should be willing to employ me, I could always take to flight again on the least hint of suspicion on your part.

“If, on the other hand, I could disguise myself sufficiently to mislead you, then I should probably be as secure in your office; from accidental exposure, as anywhere else. I little knew to what it would lead me, and what it would cost me, or I think I would rather have laid myself down on the roadside to perish.

“Not that you ever suspected me. My long illness; the terrible shock to my system; last, though not least, the hopeless search for work; had done their cruel business effectually enough, and rendered the additional disguise almost superfluous.

“I dyed my hair and beard; the fresh, healthy colour of my face had faded to a deadly pallor, and I covered my eyes with a pair of blue spectacles. I had even practiced a different tone of voice and manner of speaking, till I grew absolutely doubtful sometimes myself if I really ever had been Edwin Drood.

“You know the result, sir. I have little further to add, except that in my new position, the frequent and unavoidable contact in your office with yourself and others whom I had known and loved in my former life, and whom I neither dared to love or know now, caused me such poignant suffering as almost to unsettle my intellect; and when I learned,

from conversation between you and others, that my old rival, young Mr. Landless, had been accused of my murder, and that my uncle was the chief mover in the accusation, and was remorselessly seeking (or inventing) new proofs to hunt him down, and noted the suffering which this infamous accusation caused him—the innocent—I was torn with an agony of conflict as to what I ought to do. Ought I to deliver up Jack? Ought I to anonymously warn him?

“This anguish of mind, united to the anguish of being cut off from all near and dear to me, drove me to the verge of self-destruction. I have stood upon the brink of the river, thinking it was whispering to me to come to its bosom, and rest there from the toil of the battle. But that God, long-suffering and full of tender mercies, once more graciously interfered to save me from this most fatal crime, I should never have written these lines, and never been able to save my uncle after all.

“I resolved, finally, to watch my miserable uncle closely, to interfere, if absolutely necessary, to save Rosa from the terrible fate of being united to him, and to save poor Mr. Neville from a further accusation. Otherwise I would remain, all my life, lost and dead.

Robert Brandis's chances of happiness in the world, poor as they were, were greater, after all, than Edwin Drood's ; and I could not—could not resolve to give up my uncle, once so dearly loved, to the punishment of his crime.

“ Now the case is altered ; now, the crime has been brought home to him without my agency ; and I only seek, before leaving England for ever, probably, to prove to the world, with your assistance, now that you are in possession of the details of my escape, and proofs of the verity of my words, that Jack cannot have murdered me, because I am alive.

“ One word more, honoured sir, whom I am proud to call my friend, and to have earned as my friend during my incognito of Robert Brandis, I have entirely laid my heart open to your kindly judgment, with one exception ; and if I carry away with me into my voluntary banishment this one secret, which it is my duty to preserve sacred in my inmost soul, it is the remembrance of your noble, self-sacrificing life, now fully revealed to me, which has given me strength to do it.

“ EDWIN DROOD.”

CHAPTER VI.

MR "JEAMES" CODDLER AND HIS MISSION.

THE Revd. Septimus, laying down the manuscript, uttered a deep sigh of conviction and relief, loudly echoed by Mr. Grewgious who, from eager interest in the story, and anxiety not to lose one syllable of it, had hardly ventured to breathe during its perusal, and had endured a sort of martyrdom from restraining (for fear of interrupting) from his usual method of composing himself by smoothing his smooth head.

He now hastened to perform, with special care, this neglected rite, which seemed a sort of safety valve for his emotions, preventing (if anything could prevent) any untoward expression of the same. He further performed some eccentric experiments, with a Bandana handkerchief and his own nose, which might have been ingenious, but were certainly painful to that victimized member. And he finally chastened his own unworthy breast, which had been guilty of the enormity of doubting injured innocence, by inflicting upon it several resounding slaps (to prove

its hollowness, perhaps) before breaking out into the exclamation—

“God bless my heart and soul !”

“You anticipate me,” said Mr. Chrisparkle.

“Who could have foreseen it ?” inquired the Collector of Rents, appealing to the ceiling.

“Who, indeed ?” said Mr. Chrisparkle appealing to the window curtains.

“I shall never forgive myself !” said Mr. Grewgious, smiting himself anew upon the breast.

“Nor I, either,” said Mr. Chrisparkle, following his example.

“Lord love us !” broke out Mr. Grewgious again, in his agitation.

“May He ever do so,” answered the clergyman.

“I’m naturally as blind as a mole,” continued the disturbed Collector of Rents, “not that that’s a bit of excuse for me, and I ain’t producing it as such.”

“I can’t even plead that much in my favour,” said the self-reproachful Minor Canon, “for I see with remarkable clearness, *without* my spectacles.”

“Then what do you wear ’em for ?” inquired Mr. Grewgious, with unexpected asperity.

This naturally proving a quencher for the discomfited clergyman, he remained silent for a space, during which Mr. Grewgious, in order to ease his mind of its burden, after the manner of a self-castigating monk or nun, inflicted ingeniously cruel and severe penalties on various parts of his body; rubbing his eyes in particular into such an inflamed condition that they watered freely, though involuntarily.

“There’s one comfort,” he began again, in his usual abrupt manner, “and that is that I’m still alive to make some small compensation to the poor boy, or to try to do so. And there’s another—though I fear you won’t participate in it, and I dare say it is a proof of a weak mind—and that is, that the unfortunate wretch, whom I’ve had the chief hand in hunting down, won’t be hanged after all. I shouldn’t like to say so to any one else, but I do believe that that last event, if it had taken place, would have hurried me off the stage (as Shakespeare calls it) for ever. Not that my life or death is of any consequence to anybody, I am sure; far be it from me to presume to suppose so. But I assure you you can have no idea how the thought of it, and the horror of it, has haunted me ever since the excitement of the chase was over,

and the victim in our hands. I've slept but badly for some time, and last night Nature got the better of me ; I slept, and dreamed, such awful dreams ! I don't think I ever had the like of them before. It may," continued the old man, reflectively, "partly be attributed to a supper of cold pork and pickles—a highly undesirable diet, particularly of an evening, for a man of my age and bilious constitution—but which the waiter urged upon me and recommended (I think he hadn't anything else handy) ; assuring me he always slept particularly well after partaking of these viands. I've no right to deny their narcotic qualities, for I slept like a stone, except that—whether occasioned by pork, pickles, or an uneasy mind—I dreamed beyond the power of any stone to do ; gracious me ! how I dreamed ! The number of times I was hung during the space of one short night, and only cut down just in time, would astonish you ; and the number of times I was obliged to officiate, to my horror, as hangman to John Jasper, and couldn't cut him down in time, although I knew that Edwin Drood was not murdered, would astonish you still more, and was—to put it mildly—absolutely appalling. Of one thing I am sure—if, during my lifetime, any one else should have to be

hunted down, no torture shall induce me to undertake the office. And now I am shocked to discover that I have been chattering away—like an old magpie—about my unworthy and weak-minded self, and forgetting the most important question of all, under these unforeseen circumstances, viz:—What is the first thing to be done?”

“The affair must be brought before the authorities,” said the Minor Canon, “and the restored Edwin Drood must give his evidence. His story is so convincing that, united to the prisoner’s confession, and the finding of the ring—which only the lost youth could have been in possession of—in the empty coffin of Mrs. Sapsea, it must carry conviction to every mind, even without himself to further prove it. That is all we can do at present; and then we must await, in patience, the jury-men’s decision at the trial. You are better acquainted, naturally, with all such matters than I, but my opinion is that although, by the mercy of God, the intention to murder was frustrated, that will make little difference as to the extent of the punishment: it was a mere chance, after all, and no whit diminishes, morally, the blackness of the crime; though it is well for the poor nephew’s peace of mind that he believes otherwise. And now tell me,

did you never once during your daily contact with your clerk—never once suspect the truth?”

“When a man,” said Mr. Grewgious, in his hard, dry tone, so untrue an index to his warm and kindly heart, “when a man persists in looking in one direction, fully convinced that it is the right one, he is apt not to take too much notice of what is going on on the other side of him. When a man believes himself to be quite sure, from internal evidence, as well as external, that another man is long dead, and also that he could put his hand confidently upon the murderer, he don’t usually lay much weight upon trifling resemblances likely to shake him in his belief. A man, or (to drop the unjust simile, for what reason have I to suppose that any other man would have acted so in my position) my unworthy self, was so sure, you see, that Edwin Drood was murdered, and that the murderer, John Jasper, was not the sort of man to have done his wicked work unsuccessfully, that I never dreamed of the possibility of the nephew still being among the living. He might, therefore, have been much more like his own self, without my imagining anything more than a casual resemblance, and you have seen how terribly he is altered. Yet I am

free to confess that during the first interview I had with him, and many times afterwards, the image of the lost boy rose before me so vividly as to affect me strangely towards the man whose tone of voice, or manner, or some unanalyzed trifle, brought him back to my remembrance. I am free to confess that my heart softened towards him on that account, more than seemed prudent or rational, and that it was principally this undefinable something which induced me to engage him under the rather suspicious, and certainly unusual, manner of his application. That was all."

The conversation between the two gentlemen was interrupted at this point by a modest rap at the door, followed by the appearance of the smart little housemaid, Mary, blushing as pink as the fresh ribbons in her cap, and announcing the advent of another.

"A gentleman, Mary?"

Now Mary, whose unwonted bashfulness and heightened colour were occasioned by some highly flattering remarks which the individual in question had addressed to her at the house door, felt that he was "quite the gentleman," as she said to cook, afterwards, but, doubtful whether her master might include him in this category, answered, evasively—

“I—I think he is one of the gaolers from the prison, sir.”

“Ha!” ejaculated the Revd. Septimus, in surprise. “Then, with your permission, dear sir, we will have him in here at once. It must be something concerning the prisoner, Jasper, and that is almost more your affair than mine.”

It was the same gaoler who had conducted Mr. Chrisparkle to the cell of John Jasper, on the occasion of his memorable visit there, and who, now entering, saluted the clergyman respectfully, but at the same time with the easy manner of an old acquaintance. His face was decently mournful, like the face of one who bringeth evil tidings, yet elated, too; and though the corners of his mouth were drawn down, after a fashion common to undertakers, his small, sharp-set eyes sparkled as the eyes of an undertaker, however punctilious, are wont to sparkle, when they rest on the pompous show he has instituted. In short, the man was brimming over with interesting and exciting news; and, fully conscious of the superiority of his position to that of those hungering and thirsting for the same, he prudently stemmed the torrent within him, and proceeded to bestow it in homœopathic doses on the listeners. (By the

way, an excellent plan, and highly nutritive to curiosity.)

“Take a chair, Mr. a—a—a,” said the Minor Canon. “Nothing the matter, I hope?”

“Coddler’s my name, sir,” replied the gaoler, seating himself on the extreme edge of a chair behind the door, and taking no notice of the concluding question. “Coddler. A name as I’ve no reason to be ashamed on. A name as my fayther and grandfayther owned to afore me, and hadn’t no reason to be ashamed on, neither. For though we’ve been inmates of Cloisterham gaol the best part of a century, and spent the greater part of our lives within the walls, it’s never been from necessity, gentlemen, but from chice.”

Here Coddler blew his nose violently, as if it were the trumpet of his fame, and stealthily inserted some villainous looking snuff into his nostrils.

Mr. Chrisparkle and Mr. Grewgious, both in attitudes indicative of extreme anxiety to hear the news, remained silent, hoping, perhaps, that Coddler would come to the point the sooner if he were not interrupted. But they were reckoning without their host. Coddler, enjoying his snuff, and still more enjoying their ill-concealed desire that he should proceed, viewed them as complacently

as he might have viewed a couple of prisoners, who were burning with the wish to get out of the prison, and who wouldn't be gratified for a while.

“Jeames Coddler, which the Christian name was giv' me in my baptism, though known to my intimates as Jemmy, and so had-dressed by Mrs. Coddler, which is my wife.”

Taking no notice of this elaborate account of Coddler's name, Mr. Chrisparkle repeated his former question, with some impatience—

“Is anything the matter?”

“Well, sir,” replied the man, closing one eye, and regarding Mr. Grewgious doubtfully with the other, “I should have replied to that 'ere question sooner, but dooty is dooty, sir, and Jemmy Coddler ain't the man to neglect it. Jemmy Coddler wouldn't have attained his present respectable position in the gaol, if he had been a man to neglect it. There's a party present which is unknown to me. Is that party a party to be confided in?”

There was no earthly reason why Mr. Grewgious should not hear the revelation which Mr. Coddler was going to impart, for it was already in the possession of Mrs. Coddler, and that lady was doing her utmost to propagate it in every direction, and so successfully, that unless her conjugal mate

should hasten to the recital, there was every probability that the impatient china shepherdess, in the drawing-room above, would be in receipt of the intelligence before her son should arrive to gratify her curiosity; but when you are cock of the walk, the more you strut, the more you are looked up to, and the oftener you put down inferior cocks, the greater hero you are.

"This *gentleman*," answered the Minor Canon, with a slight touch of anger in the emphasis, "has more to do with the matter than you suppose (if, as I presume, your news bear reference to the prisoner, Jasper), and is certainly a gentleman to be confided in."

"Wery good, sir," said the gaoler, refreshing his hungry nose with another pinch of the villainous snuff, which looked as if it ought to be consigned to the prison, from necessity and for ever, "under them there circumstances, I'm free to state that something *has* happened."

"What?"

"I'm free to state," repeated the gaoler, slowly, eyeing Mr. Chrisparkle with one eye closed and the other only half open, and evidently racking his brain for an excuse to delay the communication, and enjoy his importance to the utmost limit of the listeners'

endurance, "that something most uncommon *has* happened."

"I must beg you to hasten your communication, for my time is limited," said the clergyman. He heard his mother impatiently promenading in the drawing-room.

"But before stating what it is," continued the gaoler, brightening, reopening his closed eye and petrifying Mr. Grewgious by the intensity with which he fixed him through both organs of vision, "I feels it doo to self, and doo to mates, which does their dooty at all times and seasons, like myself, to bring forrard, that not one on us had so much as breathed a syllable to the prisoner concerning the comin' to life again of Mr. Edwin Drood; which may be true, or which may not be true, and which is a rum go enough, though my news is rummer."

"Is Mr. John Jasper ill then, or—or—?"

"I'm a coming to it, sir," replied the man, doggedly, and evidently highly indisposed to do so. "Well, that there prisoner—as ought to have known better—has been and gone and done it."

"Pray relieve our anxiety and tell us what he has done?"

"The kindnesses that I've a showed that man; the care I've a took of him, never once

forgetting to double-lock his cell, or to clap him into irons when his hot fits was a coming on. The meals I've a brought him, cooked by the hands of Mrs. Coddler, which is my wife, and dirt cheap too (he meant the dinners, not Mrs. C. of course), the wine I've bought for him with his own money, to keep up his sperrits; the times I've said to him—'Hanging ain't half a bad death to die, I've good reason to know, that its uncommon quick and easy; and we're all bound for t'other world sooner or later.' Not to mention the times I've said—'Don't be down in the mouth, but never say die,' and yet that perverse and ungrateful creatur has been and gone and said it."

"Do you mean to tell us that he is dead," exclaimed the Minor Canon, with a gesture of horror, while Mr. Grewgious uttered a sharp cry, and smoothed his head with both hands at once.

"I'm a coming to it, sir. As I said to Mrs. Coddler, this morning, when she axed the same question,—I said, I'm a coming to it, and so I was."

They were forced to be patient, though Mr. Grewgious stopped the smoothing process to wring his hands wildly, and Mr. Chrisparkle bit his lip until it bled.

“It wor yesterday evening,” continued the gaoler, revelling in their agonies, “I had took him in his supper (devilled kidneys with pertaters,—a supper for a hemperor) and I says when I’d a brought it, ‘There,’ I says, ‘with a supper like that before you, never say die,’ for he *wor* oncommon dumpy, to be sure. When I fetched away the things, I noticed that he hadn’t eat nothing to speak of, but had drunk up all the wine—every drop on it,—and had broken a plate besides. I picked up the pieces, saying, as I did so, that that there plate was a particklar favourite with Mrs. Coddler, and that I should get into hot water when I went home with only the bits. I wouldn’t a took five shillings for that plate, I said, and no more I wouldn’t. He blazed up like a bundle of dry straw when a light’s thrown into it promiscus. ‘I might take myself to the devil,’ he said, ‘and the bits along wi’ me, but he’d be d—d if I should bother him,’ he said. ‘Ho,’ says I, ‘Is that your little game,’ says I. ‘Where’s them there irons,’ says I. ‘Let me pop ’em on and make you comfortable, for your hot fit is a coming on rapid,’ says I. He cooled down in a minute and begged my parding quite humble. He said his hand had shook like, and the plate

had fallen on the stones. He said he would make what amends he could ; and, in a word, his last act, so far as I was concerned, was the act of a gentleman. If I was to be hung for sayin' of it, I would still say it, and take the consequences. His last act was the act of a gentleman."

Looking upon the two almost distracted listeners, first out of one, and then out of two twinkling eyes, the man went on again.

"I went away, therefore, quite satisfied, and the devilled kidneys were warmed up for me afterwards, and, partaken of in the company of Mrs. Coddler, which is my wife, (who was consoled for the loss of the plate more easily than I had reckoned on, and was in high good humour too), were simply delicious. We finished up the evening with a couple of glasses of gin and water sweet, and laid our heads side by side upon our pillers (for I was off dooty) with happy 'earts and peaceful consciences. No wonder that we slept the sleep of the just, and didn't wake till morning.

"Mrs. Coddler made the coffee when we did, and laid a tray for the prisoner ; and I took his breakfast across to the prison before thinkin' of my own refreshment, and hastened to the cell where he was confined.

“It was damp and chilly, this morning, as you are no doubt aweer on, gentlemen, and must have rained all the night, for the water stood in little pools still in the courtyard. There wasn’t a particle of blue sky to be seen through the heavy clouds, which were gathering dark and threatening to discharge themselves afresh; and I couldn’t help shivering as I entered the prison, in which light was still burning, or it would a been a’most pitch dark.”

He was in the full swing of his narrative now, and went on without incentive.

“I never had so much trouble to open the door of his cell, as I had that morning. I was afraid the lock was hampered and was forced to put down my tray to turn the key. When I got in, I could see nothing at all, at first; but, gradually, the light shining in from the passage, through the door and the grating above the door, enabled me to make him out, crouching in a corner.

“ ‘Good morning,’ I said, cheerfully. I’m always cheerful with the prisoners, when they behaves themselves; when they don’t, I downs upon ’em violent, and that soon settles their hash. It ain’t no effort to me to be cheerful. Many o’ my mates is a’most

as low and gloomy as the prisoners themselves; they says the sight on 'em makes 'em dumpy, and the prison hatmosphere preys upon their sperrits. That's curious, ain't it? but man's a riddle, never yet solved, gentlemen. It acts different with me. When I enters a cell where a prisoner is sittin' or lyin', with the heavy chains about his feet and wrists, all alone in the gloom, the only change he can look forward to, the gallows, and ten chances to one, hell arterwards, I says to myself, 'there you are, old chap,' (meaning the prisoner), 'you can't get out, not if you wants to, ever so. Here am I,' (meaning myself), 'always able to take the hair on leave, and when I'm off dooty. There you are, dependant for your bit of daily comfort, sich as it is, on my whims and momentary temper. (I've naturally a sweet disposition, but when Mrs. Coddler is contrairy, it makes me sometimes a bit contrairy too.) Here am I, dependant on no one for the same. Now I axes you, gentlemen, ain't them considerations to make a man oncommon cheerful, and ain't it the 'ight of perwerseness not to be so. A man with his 'and upon his weskit, asserts that not to be cheerful under such circumstances, would be a hact of downright ingratitood, and challenges you, gentlemen, to wenture to give him the lie."

Neither of them choosing to enter the lists against this assertion, hurled at them with one eye shut and the other fiercely open, the keeper re-opened the closed eye, and removing a man's hand from a man's "weskit," in order to insert some snuff into a man's nose, proceeded more mildly—

"'Good morning,' says I, 'coffee, noo laid heggs, a rasher, beating holler all the hodykelone in the world for deliciousness of scent, says I. 'Look alive, ole chap, and make the most of yer time, fur I'm blowed,' I said, 'if hetarnity will find you in sich vittles as these.' Then I stopped, surprised, for notwithstanding the cheerfulness of my manner and the inspirin' natur' of my words, he made no answer.

"'Sulky,' says I, pretendin' not to mind, though all the while I felt oncommon queer, for he crouched there so still, and there was a nasty, sickenin' scent about the place which neither the coffee nor the rasher could quite get the better on. And there was a creepin' in the small of my back, gentlemen, that meant something onpleasant, though what, I couldn't tell. And I must have brought in more wet than I was aweer on, out of the wet court, for I was standing in water; and though the cells ain't over and above dry, at the best of times, they ain't so bad as that.

“I stooped down to give the prisoner a shake and rouse him up, for I thought he must be dozing in the corner : he was half sitting, half-lying, with his arms extended and his hands clasped, and his head was sunk low upon his breast. Then I drew back the hand which I had stretched out to touch him, and cried out loud, for he was wet, too, though not with water, and the pool in which I was standing, gentlemen, was blood.”

“ Blood ? ”

“ Blood ? ”

Both of his listeners had echoed the word simultaneously. Mr. Chrisparkle was leaning forward with wide open, terrified eyes upon the speaker. Mr. Grewgious had covered his with his trembling hands. The keeper uttered a sigh for decency's sake, but returned Mr. Chrisparkle's gaze with a look of heart-felt satisfaction as to the state to which he had reduced them, and which it was impossible for him to disguise.

“ Blood, gentlemen ! And what's more, human blood, gentlemen. Thickening a'ready and sickening, too, gentlemen. I upped and ran to the door in a winkin,' though I was all of a tremble. There was one o' my mates coming down the passage. I called him in, and together we examined the body. He

was quite dead and cold. For the second time he'd been and committed suicide, and this time no power on airth couldn't bring him back to life again. We found the bit of broken plate, lying beside him, with which he had cut open a vein at his wrist, and so bled to death, gentlemen."

Here the keeper sighed, a real sigh of regret that circumstances had compelled him finally to abandon his superior position, as one in possession of a most interesting secret which others were dying to hear; but philosophically comforting himself with the reflection that he couldn't have retained it much longer, anyway, he grew resigned, after a pinch of snuff, to his fate, and continued his narration, though the zest of it was gone.

"I ain't the sort to get a turn easy, gentlemen, and I hope I shan't lose nothing of your good opinion, when I say that my stummick seemed to turn round inside o' me, when I saw him a weltering in his life's blood there upon the cold stone floor. I think if a man's stummick should remain immovable at such a sight, a man must be without bowels altogether, gentlemen. I couldn't touch a bit of breakfast when I got home, and a'most frightened Mrs. Coddler to death, at a time when, not to speak indelicate, Mrs. Coddler

hadn't ought to have been frightened, for fear of consequences. There's nothing like blood, gentlemen, for takin' away a man's appetite ; not even love can't do it easier ; though I wasted away to a mere nothing when courting my wife, though not so much on account of love, as because of a aggerawating black-eyed young schoolmaster, who was a doing the same thing at the same time, and could make poetry, which I couldn't. And now, gentlemen, unless you've anything further as you might wish to be informed on, having discharged my commission, I'll make myself scarce."

Here the speaker fixed one eye so severely on Mr. Grewgious, who had removed his hands from his face, and was attentively regarding him, that that distressed gentleman, who had preserved until then complete silence, with the one exception of the cry which had involuntarily escaped him, felt imperatively called upon to offer some observation, and inquired feebly, evidently hardly knowing what he was saying—

"How did the dead man look?"

"Did you ever see a dead donkey?" inquired the keeper, with a sidelong wink, intended for the Minor Canon's private edification.

“No, I don’t think I ever did,” replied Mr. Grewgious, bewildered. (Dead donkeys were not a staple commodity in Staple Inn.)

“Or a dead duck?”

“Only roasted,” answered Mr. Grewgious, distractedly conscious that he was making a fool of himself.

“Or a drowned codfish?”

“Only boiled,” answered the unfortunate gentleman, now quite off his head, with more wit than wisdom.

“Then if I says that he didn’t look a bit like either on ’em separate, nor much like all three on ’em put together, I hope I renders myself intelligible to any individual possessing common intelligence,” said the gaoler, removing the glaring eye which had reduced the Collector of Rents to such a deplorable condition, and from that moment concentrating both organs of vision solely on the Minor Canon, until the end of the interview.

Mr. Grewgious, on receiving this withering retort, closed both the eyes which were his own property, and, retiring into himself, remained there until the gaoler was gone.

“Pretty Mary was waiting in the passage to open the door for the gaoler, who was “quite the gentleman” and received as re-

ward for her attention, a look of such ardent admiration, that Mrs. Coddler would have been fully justified in going into hysterics at the sight of it, and Bill Bumpkins almost justified in committing manslaughter on the strength of it, and which sent that indiscreet damsel back to the kitchen one "mask of blushes," as cook said.

"But the gaoler's wife, a silly, softhearted, and soft-headed little thing, although fully capable, on occasion, of donning a certain masculine article of apparel, usually considered the prerogative of the stronger sex, had insisted on seeing the dead man, notwithstanding the risk she incurred, in doing so, of receiving a shock at a time, as her husband said, when a shock was particularly undesirable, and she, who had been suckled by a novel-reading mother, and weaned on romances, was either better able, or better willing to report how the dead man looked. She told all her friends and acquaintances, who told all theirs again immediately afterwards, until the echoes even penetrated into Minor Canon Corner, that his face, pale as that death which had claimed him, was not distorted or horrible, but wonderfully and grandly beautiful; that his extended arms looked as if he were clasping in imagination

a loved image to his heart, over which his bowed head was bent; and that his lips, slightly opened, seemed to have stiffened with the ecstasy of giving and receiving an impassioned kiss.

CHAPTER VII.

EDWIN AND ROSA.

It had been necessary, of course, to acquaint Rosa with the fact of Edwin Drood's re-appearance, and also of the death, in the prison, of his and her most cruel enemy; and although these communications had been made with the tenderest care and forethought for her invalid condition, the startling intelligence had so nervously affected her, that a relapse, sufficiently severe to re-awaken the liveliest fears on her account, had been the immediate result. She had earnestly, even with tears, requested permission to see the recovered lover of her childish days, whose supposed death she had so deeply and sincerely mourned, but the doctor had peremptorily refused assent until she should be better, and her nerves stronger to support the natural agitation of the interview. Thus some weeks had elapsed, during which Edwin's claims had been legally and undoubtedly established, the dead body of the suicide committed to dust, and popular excitement lulled again, before the two, separated by so strange a destiny,

and brought together again by a destiny stranger still, met face to face.

Rosa, from whose pale cheeks the faint roses, which returning health had brought there some weeks before, had again taken their departure, was sitting, carefully wrapped up, in a little low rocking-chair by a blazing fire, when the grave, hollow-eyed, bearded young man, whom henceforth she must receive as Edwin Drood, accompanied by Mr. Grewgious and Mr. Chrisparkle, came in and stood before her.

They had told her that she would fail to recognise him, as others had done. They had gently, but firmly, prepared her for the startling change which illness and mental agony had wrought in his youthful face. They had reminded her of the ravages which a terrible storm may work in a few short hours, and had told her not to forget that he had been struggling with the storm for one long year.

But they were wrong, wrong. She knew him—would have known him anywhere, with the quick, superior instinct of a true woman, who does not wait to calculate or prove, but simply feels. It was he, and not she, who was startled and alarmed. Was that puny, pale little creature in the low chair, the

blooming girl whom he had left? He drew back, startled and inexpressibly shocked, burying his face in his hands with a passionate cry.

“Eddy, Eddy!” she cried, pathetically, stretching out her wasted hands. “Come to me, brother. Nearer, nearer! Let me touch you, brother. Let me be quite certain that I have really got you once more.”

The same sweet, familiar voice! More soft and womanly than of yore, and without a shadow of the former petulance; yet also without a whit less of the old musical ring in the tone of it. He came forward, vainly endeavouring to conquer the emotion which the sight of her, and the change in her, awakened, sank upon his knees before her, and laid his weary head upon her lap.

There was silence in the room, only broken by the low and subdued, yet plainly audible, weeping of the young man. Mr. Chrisparkle and Mr. Grewgious had turned aside to hide their starting tears from one another, with that strange shyness which men exhibit on giving way to an emotion which only does them honour. And bright drops from Rosa's eyes were falling thick upon the young man's shining hair. When the girl spoke again, and she was the first to regain her composure and

to do so, the two elder gentlemen quietly left the room, and the two alone together.

The young man wept still, though more quietly, the while she tried to comfort him. The joy of hearing her, and resting there; the intense happiness of knowing that her recognition of him had been complete and instantaneous; the sorrow of finding her so sadly changed; the mingled feeling of gladness and pain at her re-assuming, as the natural one, the new relation which they had agreed, in their last meeting, to adopt towards one another—all these things so unmanned him that he could form no other wish than that he might kneel there for ever, at the feet of the woman he had learned to love, too late, until he died.

“Eddy, dear, look up, and let me see you,” she said at length, when she had exhausted all her resources of comfort for him, and he still knelt motionless.

He raised his tear-stained face instantly. How different from the old time when he had been united to her by a far nearer and dearer tie. Now her slightest wish was his law.

“Do my looks frighten you, Rosa? Am I a terrible object to look upon?” he inquired, earnestly.

She laughed, almost merrily—

“You are grown into a man, Eddy, as I am grown into a woman, and I don’t think you are a bit the worse for the change; only you are too grave and sad. But by-and-by you will get the better of that, and it’s not your fault, poor boy!”

The sweet naturalness of her manner, which seemed to bridge over the gulf which had yawned between them, and to make a way for his clumsier man’s feet to pass to her, was inexpressibly loving and beautiful. All the awkwardness and strangeness of their position towards one another melted away before its influence, like morning mist before the sun. Yet there was no idea of encouragement in it to any possible renewal of the rent bonds between them. Though she had torn down one barrier, which might have kept them strangers all the rest of their lives, her delicate womanly instinct had instantly erected another, finer, subtler, but not a whit less tangible. She was his warmly interested friend—his loving and affectionate sister; nothing more.

“Rosa, darling sister, if you will allow me to call you so, can you really forgive me my share in your sufferings? forgive me the relationship with your persecutor?”

“Was that unhappy man not yours, also,

Eddy? We have both suffered—you, ten thousand times more than I—both partly innocently, and both, perhaps, partly justly. Let us forgive him, Eddy. Let us remember that his power to injure us is lost for ever, and that we have no right to judge him any more, for he has been judged by God. And having forgiven him—with all our hearts, brother—let us strive to forget. For his sake, and for our own, let us strive to forget.”

She was right. He had forgiven him all the injuries he himself had suffered, long ago, and if he still felt resentment, it was only on her account. She was right. From that moment the name of the dead man was a sealed book between them. They shed together a few last tears over his grave before leaving him to his Creator.

“And now, Eddy, dear,” began Rosa, in a sprightlier tone, after a short period of reverential silence, in which they had taken a final farewell of the dead, “now, Eddy, dear, let us talk about our plans for the future, and what we both mean to do in the life—the long life, possibly, for we are both so young still—which lies before us. Let us begin with you, Eddy, because you are far the most important, you know. What are you going to do?”

Could she not understand the yearning look in his wistful eyes, or would she not? Was her usually so keen instinct quite unaware of the passionate longing of his heart? However that might be, she made no sign, and waited quietly, unmoved (so he thought) for his answer.

“Mr. Grewgious, Rosa—my best friend and almost father, whom I love and reverence more than words can tell, and whom it is my pride and pleasure to obey—tells me I must go to Egypt, and assume the place and position there, which belong to me by inheritance, and for which I have been educated. It seems a little hard to have to leave my friends again so soon, after my year of cruel banishment; but he thinks it best, and if you advise it too, Rosa, I will go.”

He had tried to speak hopefully and cheerfully, but the effort had only made the heart's sadness, which rang through his words, more apparent. He hoped, perhaps, that she would try to dissuade him; at all events, express some sympathy for him, perhaps even say how sorry she would be to lose him. But though she remained silent for a few moments, when she spoke at last, her voice was clear and calm.

“Yes, Eddy. That will be the best thing,

certainly. There's nothing like earnest, hearty work to keep down all sorrowful thought; and in a strange country, with nothing to remind you of old scenes and old events, you will soon out-live your troubles, and grow into a bright and happy man again. It may be a sharp remedy, Eddy, and need some courage on your part, but it is a sure one."

"Then I will go, Rosa. The sooner the better. No one can be more anxious to get rid of me than I am to get rid of myself."

Taking no apparent notice of the bitter disappointment which had found utterance in the last words, she went on in her soft, sweet voice, pouring healing balm into his festering wounds.

"And you will not forget your sister in England, Eddy," she said, affectionately, laying her small, white hand gently on his clustering hair, "you will write to me sometimes, and tell me what you are doing, and how you are getting on, and all your triumphs of engineering skill in the far country which I used to tease you about when I was a self-willed, naughty girl, who needed some sorrow to curb her waywardness."

It was a dangerous thing to have reminded him of, as she read in a moment in his up-

turned face and eager eyes, and she continued hurriedly—

“But your sister is older and wiser now, Eddy, and even if she were not that last, she promised never to tease you any more, if you recollect, and means to keep her word. So you must make her your *confidante*, and be sure that she will always feel a loving interest in her brother, and prove herself worthy to be trusted in. And if, Eddy, the time should come, as it will, no doubt, when (she hesitated a moment, then went on steadily) when you fall in love with some sweet girl, who loves you dearly in return, brother, then you must tell me all about it, and must tell her of the little sister whom you left behind in the old country, and who will love her, too, for her dear brother’s sake.”

His face, which had been flushed from weeping and excitement, paled as she spoke, and his eyes rested upon the sweet lips uttering his doom, with sadness unspeakable, and almost with reproach. He was going to passionately repudiate the idea that he would ever marry, and thus reveal a secret which his conscience told him it would be base and cowardly to do now that it was too late, and which would, perhaps, completely alienate her. But he refrained in time.

“Yes,” he answered, so quietly as to be barely audible, “when I fall in love and marry, I shall certainly tell you of it.” Then, with effort, “Now that I am settled and done for, tell me what is to become of you?”

She breathed more freely, and a look of anxiety which had overshadowed her face, brightened into a smile of relief. She knew that they had been treading dangerous ground, although she herself had been the leader there. Possibly she had wished to avoid ground more dangerous still.

“It is nice of you to want to know, Eddy, dear, and I am so glad to have a kind listener to tell it to. I have thought about it a good deal lately, because I foresee that I shall soon be terribly in the way here, kind as they all are to me. I sometimes have been so silly as to cry a little when I was alone, and to fancy myself solitary and uncared for. But it was ungrateful and wicked to think so, for I have so many more kind friends than I deserve; and now I have got you, my brother, I am quite content and happy.”

She squeezed his hand, resting in hers, and smiled as he gently touched hers with his lips.

“So I have made a little plan, Eddy, which will be charming; and if my guardian will consent, and I think he will, for he does

everything—dear, good man!—to please me, I hope to carry it out. For, one thing is certain, I can't stay here much longer."

"Why, Rosa?"

"Oh! I hope I know what is proper and what is not," she answered laughing and blushing, and looking mischievously at him out of her dancing eyes. "But it's a secret, and I can't tell you, unless you are clever enough to guess, Eddy. Try."

"How can I guess, Rosa, without a particle of clue?"

"Dear me, Eddy, you are quite as stupid as you used to be! Oh! I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to say that. But confess that you are a little wee bit of a goose after all. I should have guessed it in a minute."

Had she been talking about a possible wife for him in Egypt as a preparation—a merciful preparation—for what she had in store for him, on her own account. Must she leave the house in Minor Canon Corner, in order to sacrifice to the proprieties, before returning thither as its mistress. His fears, blinding him, as unreasonable fears always do, presented this interpretation of her words, as the only one possible. He had never thought of Mr. Chrisparkle as a suitor to the girl whom he had learned to love in losing, until

he presented himself to his terrified imagination as a full-blown and succesful one.

“Is Mr. Chrisparkle—?” he asked, in very agony, as the hopes he cherished, in spite of his all-but certainty in their fallacy, faded away to nothing.

“Charming, Eddy! No, you are not stupid, but the cleverest of boys.”

“Going to be—”

“De—li—cious!” exclaimed Rosa, in an ecstasy, clapping her hands, “I have heard, somewhere that, if women are quick, they are shallow, and that men, though slow, are deep, and it is true, Eddy. Now, I hope that compliment has quite purchased my pardon for calling you (unintentionally, I am sure) stupid. Go on, Eddy, you are as warm as warm can be.”

“Married, Rosa?”

She sprang to her feet, and tried to dance across the room in her old wild way. It was a failure; her feet were not strong enough for dancing yet, but the effort showed the lightness of her heart. He caught her frail figure, and replaced it in the chair. She little knew how sadly.

“When I’ve got my breath, Eddy, I’ll tell you something more. In the meantime, guess who it is.”

“I can’t guess, Rosa.”

“Not guess, after guessing so famously. Well, I’ll give you a hint—a very broad one. It’s an old flame of yours, Eddy—oh, my eyes were sharp as razors, and I saw—and the handsomest girl in Cloisterham.”

“Then it must be you, Rosa.” Yet his heart was lighter already.

She laughed; such a clear, joyous, ringing laugh. Mr. Grewgious heard it in the room below, where he was waiting, and he laughed, too, for very joy and sympathy. And Edwin Drood’s fears fled away before it, back to that land of foolish fancies whence they came.

“Oh, Eddy, dear! do you think I am vain enough to call myself something that I never was, even before I lost my beauty, now that I have grown into a little fright?”

“You, a fright, Rosa?”

It was said with such genuine surprise, that it was worth a thousand asseverations to the contrary from one better versed in the art of paying compliments.

The girl laughed again. She had hardly laughed once in that old, wilful, charming way since he was lost, last Christmas Eve.

“It is very kind of you, Eddy, to pretend not to see it; and I do hope, when my hair is grown again, that I shall recover some

portion of my good looks, which I was so vain of once, and which I have abused so much since, and yet which I am so sorry to have lost after all, I'm such a little inconsistent thing. But, not to talk about that any more, guess who it is Mr. Chrisparkle is going to marry."

"Since it is not you, Rosa, I do not care."

"But you must care, Eddy, because you are my brother, and because I care so much; for she is my dearest friend, and has been my most loving nurse, and I am glad with all my heart to know that she will be so happy, for I love her dearly."

"Can it be—?"

"Yes, Eddy dear," she answered with a smile and a tear, laying, with her old pretty naturalness, her small forefinger upon his lips to prevent the word hovering there from escaping them, "but don't speak it out loud, because they don't know it themselves for certain yet, though it's as plain as plain can be; and I tell it to you only to prevent your cherishing any hopes in that direction, which would cause you and them needless pain."

What a wise little thing she had become! he said, in one short year; what a prudent and farseeing little sister! But there was no fear of that; oh no! no fear of that.

His sad earnestness seemed to strike her. She looked at him with a quiver, almost like fear, on her sensitive lips, and a faint shadow on her candid brow. But he returned her gaze so quietly, so trueheartedly, that she grew reassured.

“I hope it is no breach of confidence, Eddy, to have told you,” she went on, after they had sat thus a few moments in silence, “and yet it can’t be, either, for they never confided in me; or a breach of—of—. Well, never mind what it is, if it is not wrong; and I do not think it can be that, for I only meant to avoid trouble in telling you. And besides, Eddy, I know you will be discreet, and not betray me.”

She might be quite, quite sure of that, he said.

“I have seen it coming on for a long while :” continued Rosa, delighted with the subject, and doubly delighted, like the majority of her sex in possession of such a secret, not be obliged to keep it locked up within her own bosom, but to have found some one to whom she might dilate upon it, “they were made for one another. She is so grandly beautiful, so majestic, Eddy, that she kept all gentlemen at a distance, and I believe, although they couldn’t help admiring her, they were all

afraid of her, though she has the kindest and noblest heart in the world : but with him she is like a little child ; so gentle and so humble, and as pliable as a bit of soft wax in his hands. He is moulding her into the gentlest, sweetest and loveliest clergyman's wife in all England, and when she is that, and the last touch has made her quite perfect for the office, why, then I should be terribly in the way, and that's the reason I must go."

"You in anybody's way, Rosa !" He seemed to think it an impossibility.

"Of course, Eddy. And I'm thankful that I've wit enough to see it, and instead of waiting to be turned out, have the sense to take my departure, so long as I can accomplish it with dignity. And now, Eddy, before proceeding any further, there's one thing I wish to mention seriously. I have found you extremely satisfactory, on the whole, and am very, very glad to have got my dear brother again (affectionately), but I see the germs of a fault in you, which I never saw before, and I want you, as far as I am concerned, to destroy them as fast as possible."

"If," he said, colouring deeply, "if she saw any fault in him, painful or disagreeable to her, and she would have the kindness to tell him what it was, he would not rest until

he had conquered it. To do so," he added, "should be the chief object of his life."

"There you go, Eddy," she answered, "and that is just the very thing I mean. The chief object of your life must not be to please me. You must find a higher object than that, brother. And to tell you plainly what I mean: I have discovered in you a tendency to pay compliments, which I fear will grow upon you. I do not mean to say," she said, with the air of a connoisseur, "that you have attained any great proficiency in the art; but the wish to do so is too apparent; and if you have overcome many faults of your boyhood, and you have, I am sure, this is a newly-acquired one; for then, if I remember right, it was not a habit of yours, rather the contrary."

If she could have known; if she could have known, how her words were torturing him. If she could have known how the remembrance of his careless and indifferent behaviour towards her in the old time was a daily agony for him now.

"And," she went on, quite unconscious of the pain she was inflicting, "brothers never pay compliments. I know that, because all the girls in the Nuns' House, who had any, said so. The principal use of brothers, Miss

Williams used to say, was, that even truer than your own looking-glass they were sure to tell you, if you were not looking so fresh and bright as usual.

He would endeavour not to offend in that way again, although he had not been aware of having done so. And now (to change the conversation) would she not tell him when she was going?

“Certainly, Eddy, though I had nearly forgotten it. I mean, if he will have me, to go and live with my guardian. He is such a good, good man, and I love him dearly, dearly; and he is so lonely in Staple Inn and those dull old gloomy chambers; so, one day, when I was thinking about him, and about myself, and feeling—I am ashamed to say it again, because it is so ungrateful of me—almost as if I were as uncared-for and solitary as he, this plan came into my head, and I said to myself: one and one make two, and two lonely ones together are not lonely any more; and I can make him happy, and he me.”

“Dear, generous Rosa!”

“Eddy, I hope that’s not a—you know what, but really meant, and therefore I will pass it over, and thank you, too, for what is kindly intended, though undeserved, I am

sure. Therefore, when he came to see me, so glad to find me better, and took me in his arms, calling me his dear child! his pretty, blessed child! and kissed me, weeping, till I felt his tears—an old man's tears, Eddy—on my cheek, I made up my mind to be his child in reality, to devote my life to cheering his; and in making him happy, I know I shall be still happier myself."

Although the childish beauty—the fresh budding beauty of the growing girl—had faded, perhaps never to return, there was a far higher beauty shining through her radiant eyes, and refining and idealizing every feature of her earnest face.

If it had been possible for him, he thought, to love her better, he must have done so now, when he felt, as he had never felt before, that the beautiful body only covered up a soul more lovely still, and which could never fade or perish.

"I have a little money of my own, Eddy, so that I need not be a burden to him in that way; and we might take a nice little cozy house in some pretty neighbourhood, not all too far from Staple Inn; and then some nice old lady must come and live with us, who will have nothing to do but doze comfortably by the fire, when he is at home, and be company

for me when he is at his office ; and when he comes home tired, Eddy, and fagged from his day's work perhaps, his little daughter will be standing upon the doorstep to receive him ; to take nice walks with him in the summer evenings ; to sing and play for him in the winter ones ; to make him forget dull Staple Inn and all its account books and worrying clerks (forgive me, Eddy, I don't mean you), and wish the evenings were twice, three times as long as they are. Isn't that a charming prospect, brother ?”

Oh, Heaven ! Such a charming prospect ! Oh, God, such a glimpse of Paradise, before the door is shut for ever ! Oh, what a reward to have been able to look forward to, if God had willed it, at the end of a long life's work ! Such were his thoughts, as he bowed his head to hide the starting tears he dared not let her see.

“ Thus the happy days will flow on, Eddy ; calm and peaceful, if God permits, and varied from too severe a sameness by the frequent receipt of letters from my brother in Egypt, who will not forget his sister, I know. And though benignant Time will almost seem to stand still with my guardian, his loving daughter will grow, little by little, into an old maid—not a cankering, back-biting old maid, Eddy,

I hope, but a kind-hearted, benevolent and happy one; and as busy a little old maid, Eddy, as any under the sun."

She felt, long before he could utter it, the almost indignant negation to this last part of her plans, upon his lips, and held up her small hand to prevent his giving it utterance.

"Don't interrupt me, Eddy, please, for I've nearly finished. There are sure to be some nice little children somewhere (and I'm going to be an old maid very fond of children) who are poor, and whom I can sew for, and make warm clothes for, when winter comes; and nice old women, too, with asthma or rheumatism, who will let me visit them and bring them little comforts, such as broth, or jellies, which I will learn to make from the clever old lady who is going to live with us. And then I think they may learn to love me, Eddy; for love is something I do covet, and cannot do without."

Love her! Who could help it? One who lavished love on others so freely was sure of a return.

"And when my brother from Egypt comes to visit us—bringing a dear little wife—or, no, a big one: I haven't forgotten your partiality for big women, with big noses, Eddy

(whimsically, and with a half-return of the old propensity to tease him)—and, perhaps, some dear little children, whom I shall love so much that they won't be able to help loving their aunty in return (and one of them must be my namesake, Eddy), then I shall be as happy a little old maid as can be. There won't be a little old maid in all England so happy as I."

If she could have known, that each loving word fell upon his heart like a liquid drop of fire, how it would have wrung her gentle heart! If she could but have known!

He sat silent, with his sad, sad eyes upon her. She thought he was pitying her for a fate which not all her bright hopefulness could induce him to concur in, as a suitable or natural one for her; and his quiet compassion forced a tear into her eye.

"I don't mean to say, Eddy," she went on, more gravely, "that it's quite as brilliant or rainbow-tinted a life as I fancied mine was going to be when I was a babyish, ignorant girl in the Nuns' House. But my air-castles have melted away, one by one, and I'm too old and sensible now to build up any more such unsubstantial edifices. And now, Eddy dear, I hear Mr. Grewgious on the stairs, and I remember the doctor told

me on no account to talk too much, or too long, and I've been chattering away all the time like a magpie. I'm afraid I must send you away for the present, if I am ever to get permission to see you again."

He rose immediately, holding out his hand.

Rosa, with an innocent and unconscious impulse, half-raised her sweet face to his, as if she expected, and would have permitted, the accustomed caress, natural to the new and near relationship which they had adopted—still more natural to the old one they had abandoned, nearer still—that accustomed caress, which he had given and received so indifferently and carelessly in the old time, and which he would have given the whole world and its possessions to have dared to accept now.

And all the lost beauty came back with a rush, when he turned away, purposely or without purpose, unheeding it, with the crimson tint of shame which flooded her pale face, and burned there like fire, long after he was gone.

If she could have known—if she could have known, how gladly he would have given up every other hope in life to have dared to accept the priceless boon which she had offered him—all unconscious of its worth.

If she could have known, that only the certainty of betraying himself, if his lips met hers, had made him turn away from a source, sweeter to him far than anything in earth or heaven, and which, having once tasted, he must have striven to win for ever, or died in the attempt.

CHAPTER VIII.

SORROW AND JOY.

THE good people of Cloisterham, though a little less wide-awake than was desirable, and a good bit behindhand in certain new-fangled ways which circulated freely in the world beyond them, particularly in that great and mighty city (mighty for evil as well as good) removed so short a distance, as to be almost a next door neighbour, were not a particle less kindly at heart than other folks, who made more noise in the world than they, surrounded by so many evidences of sleep and slow decay, were ever likely to do, in the drowsy city of their birth ; and a Cloisterham conscience, once roused, was rather more restive than an average conscience on the whole, and capable of inflicting pricks no way to be disregarded. Thus, the honest inhabitants of this ancient city, who had until now strongly sympathised with John Jasper, no sooner really comprehended (a slow process, for its worst enemy couldn't accuse Cloisterham of having a quick comprehension) that they had been upon a wrong tack, than

they veered round completely to the other side; and, in the enthusiasm for the falsely accused boy, and the furious indignation against his accuser, even the nephew, Edwin Drood, who had been the greatest sufferer, was quasi-neglected, or even looked upon askant, as an instrument, although an unwilling one, in the persecution; for all eyes were directed towards the hero of the occasion—towards poor Neville. Every one wanted to atone in some measure for his own share in the persecution, and thus appease his troubled conscience, ere it was too late; for those, who had eyes to understand the significant language of his wasted form and too brilliant colour, saw in the lad's face the unmistakable signs of death. Alas! popular adulation, or popular execration, were synonymous terms to him now, except for Helena's dear sake. For, before his earnest eyes turned towards a land afar off, the world, and the things of the world, were passing away.

Even the Dean, in his own carriage, accompanied by Mrs. Dean, and Miss Dean in gorgeous array, and with Bill Bumpkins (known in his His Reverence's family as William) in the most ecclesiastical of liveries, upon the box, drove up in state before the modest abode in Minor Canon Corner, where

he was received with the distinction appropriate to his spiritual rank by the flattered china shepherdess and her son. Bill Bumpkins had ample opportunity of displaying his new livery to the admiring eyes of Mary and cook, and also of inciting the naturally *extremely* quiet horses to prance and paw the ground in imitation of more spirited "bits of horseflesh," as he called them; and further to bring cook into a state of wild jealousy, in which she was even goaded so far as to call the favoured Mary a "wain huzzy," long before his master and mistress took their seats again.

Mrs. Chrisparkle had insisted on refreshing her guests (frightfully in need of refreshment, for it was full five minutes walk from the Deanery to Minor Canon Corner) with a glass of her best wine and a biscuit; and they all sat together, enjoying these dainties and amusing themselves, each according to his or her nature. Miss Dean was inclined to patronise Rosa, though, as she remarked afterwards, her beauty, always very much over-rated, was quite gone, but Mrs. Dean took the girl to her motherly bosom, pressing her lips to Rosa's rosy ones with a smack which would have done honour to any warm-hearted butcher's wife in the kingdom.

“Why, you are getting quite plump again, my pretty,” she said, with another smack on Rosa’s cheek; so hearty, that it glowed after it, like a rose, “and you must come and see us, as soon as ever you are allowed to go out. Jane,” indicating her daughter, “will be delighted to see you, I’m sure. Won’t you, Jane?”

Miss Dean’s face showed no appearance of delight, but it belied her, for she answered that she should.

“And this is your handsome friend, is it?” enquired the Deaness, further surveying Helena’s graceful figure with undisguised admiration, “who has performed such prodigies of nursing, as our old doctor tells me. I won’t say don’t blush, my dear, because it becomes you so wonderfully, but I will say, that our dear Mrs. Chrisparkle and her worthy son are to be envied the constant sight of two such beauties, and that we mean to put in a claim for a share of the gratification.”

If the roses, blooming anew on Rosa’s delicate cheek, might have been compared, without poetical license, to those sweet ones called “maiden’s blush,” those on Helena’s could only be likened to that “red, red rose,” which, according to the old song, “my love

is like.” As for those on Miss Dean’s, any comparison would be odious, which would attempt to describe them, as she tossed her head, wondering what on earth mamma was thinking of, and that it was absolute dotage for a lady in possession of one such beauty, to covet any two others.

Meanwhile the unconscious Mrs. Dean, quite innocent of any intention to offend, was rattling on, with her cheerful pleasant voice, and ready good humour.

“Where’s your brother—your twin brother, my dear, whom we specially came to see; for we all feel as if we were accountable, partly, for the wrong done him, and want to pet and cosset him, and make as much of him as we can.”

Helena explained that he was still staying at the Crozier with Rosa’s guardian, Mr. Grewgious; but, that the latter gentleman was intending, accompanied by Mr. Edwin Drood, to return to London on the morrow, and that then, her brother, in compliance with the kind and earnest invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Chrisparkle, who would hear of no denial, would take up his quarters at their hospitable house in Minor Canon Corner, until he was strong enough to work again.

“No,” continued Helena, in answer to an

unspoken question in Mrs. Dean's sympathising face, "he was not ill, dear fellow! Only a little weak and delicate. He had been working too hard in London, and in heavy shadow. He would soon brighten in the sunshine. He was already getting better every day; oh, yes! getting better every day."

She spoke these last words impetuously, as if in struggle against possible opposition to them; and her almost passionate earnestness brought the tears into her eyes.

This evidence of emotion so softened the proud face—always haughtier when with strangers—and so subdued the fiery orbs, that warm-hearted Mrs. Dean could not refrain any longer from doing, what she had longed, yet been half afraid, to do before; she took the girl into her close embrace, and kissed her, as she had kissed Rosa.

"There now, my dear, you mustn't be angry with me, for I couldn't help it. I've had a great many bonnie lassies of my own, and they've all married and left me, except Jane, and it makes me naturally feel motherly towards all girls; particularly towards two orphan ones, like you and little Miss Bud. And you won't be offended, will you, Mrs. Chrisparkle? at my taking the liberty to send

you, as I shall, a few bottles of *the* port, from our cellar. *The* port, which the Bishop said was the very best he ever drank, on the occasion of his last visit,—for the poor, dear boy, you know. And if *that* won't make him strong again, why, nothing will. And now, before going away, and I see those spirited animals are pawing the ground before your door all to pieces; we really must get quieter ones, or I shall suffer a thousand overturns, (in imagination) behind them—now, promise me, that you will all, Mr. Landless and Mr. Drood too, if he is here—all come and dine at the Deanery, as soon as possible. John said I was to ask you, didn't you, John?"

John was his Reverence the Dean. Mrs. Dean dared call him so.

His Reverence and Mr. Chrisparkle had been conversing earnestly apart, all this time, greatly to the annoyance of the Deanly daughter, who had hoped for a special opportunity of displaying her charms before the dazzled eyes of the latter gentleman, and who now saw the time for departure close at hand without having had the slightest opportunity of doing so. "All is vanity," soliloquised Miss Dean, suddenly smitten with Solomonic wisdom, "even my Parisian hat."

"Didn't you, John?" repeated Mrs. Dean.

All eyes were turned towards his Reverence, and all ears in the room heard this remark from his august lips.

“Ha—hum! To err, Mr. Chrisparkle, is—is human. To see and acknowledge one’s error, is—is—is—human too.”

If it hadn’t been a Dean, this might have sounded like stammering, and elicited the reflection that his Reverence, like many a lesser light, had entangled himself in a quotation, and hadn’t seen his way clearly out of it, but it *was* a Dean, and to have supposed that his Reverence had nearly been upon the point of saying that “to see and acknowledge one’s error was *divine*,” would have been monstrous, and next door to blasphemy. Therefore, all listened to his words with profound respect, and seemed to be committing them to memory, as if they had been the words of an oracle. The Dean beamed around him, complacently sensible of this silent homage, and enquired, blandly—

“Did you speak to me, Darling?”

“You said, only this morning, that they must all dine with us, didn’t you, John?”

“I did,” replied His Reverence, conscious that this was almost unparalleled condescension, yet benevolently desirous to prevent its weighing too heavily on the souls of those

so highly favoured. "I—I did. And I shall be very glad to—to see them."

Having thus reached the climax, the Dean allowed himself and family to be escorted to the carriage in waiting, and to be assisted to enter it, by the alert Minor Canon, in the eyes of all Cloisterham (at any rate, in the eyes of those few who happened to be crossing the Close at the moment) and thus having shown the inhabitants which way the wind blew, left them to follow suit, and blow in the same direction.

They were all unanimous in Minor Canon Corner, that it had been a most delightful visit, and only one fear oppressed the china shepherdess.—Could Miss Dean, with those sharp little eyes of hers, have possibly discovered her son's partiality for the beautiful Helena, and could she ever find out how glad in her heart the old lady was, that his choice had not fallen upon her. And the worst of it was, that she could only ask these questions of herself, and, however oft repeated, a question is no answer.

Mr. Grewgious and Edwin Drood had returned to London, the latter to make immediate preparations for his voyage to Egypt, and the former to resume his duties in his neglected office, to try to make up for lost

time, and to advertise for another new clerk, to enter upon his work as speedily as possible. Rosa was quite "out of the sick list," as she said, and the timid roses which Mrs. Dean's salute had brought up to her cheeks had grown quite bold, and refused to evacuate their newly won places any more. She had cast off the invalid, and taken her old place in the family circle, which she made musical with her sweet voice and simple songs. But the old doctor still came to Minor Canon Corner, and calves foot jellies, and chicken broth, were daily prepared there as before, and voices were hushed, and tiny feet crept on tiptoe when another slept, for the place vacated was refilled by a new invalid, Helena's only brother.

Yet Neville's decline was so gradual, that the one who loved him most of all, whose life was, so to speak, bound up in his, positively refused to see it. If his cough was more wearing and constant (and it was), why, that was not surprising. It was winter-time, close on Christmas, and in spring it would be better. Other people had coughs and got rid of them. If his strength for walking far was gone, even when supported on her never-tiring arm (and it was), why, that was nothing to be alarmed at either. His seden-

tary habit of life in Staple Inn, his too close study, had pulled him down a little, and now that the weight, the intolerable weight, under which he had laboured, was taken off, now that all the world knew that he was no murderer, no base assassin, the natural elasticity of his constitution would quickly make him rise again. She put away the thought, the doubt, which would come sometimes, that,—perhaps, perhaps? with indignation, as something sinful. Had God raised up for them such noble friends, cleared away the obstacles in their path, brought them so far on their thorny road, to blast His own work at last? Was not the fear sinful, and bitter wrong to Him. If that had been His purpose, then why had He not left them both to perish, and not mocked them with groundless hope. God forgive her for even this shadow of doubt in His goodness.

Having reached this point, she would begin again to bring forward further proof that she was right, though her sinking heart would sometimes warn her that her proofs were built upon the sand, even though she despised the warning. Was not his eye clear and bright? His brow free again from the melancholy which had overclouded it? Had his smile ever been so bright and sunny, his

laugh, though feeble, ever so joyous? Thus she battled fiercely and ceaselessly with the doubt in the faces of others, and the doubt in her own heart, putting it away from her as if to harbour it were an infamous and deadly crime.

Ah, how easy it is to persuade ourselves that what we earnestly desire is good and virtuous, and what we dread, bad and opposed to God's will! How easy it is, comparatively, to talk down our own conscience and bring forward a thousand arguments,—indisputable arguments—to silence its remonstrances. Nay, there are some among us,—many, may be,—who have, by dint of a course of rigid discipline, so trained and cowed this “still small voice” as to have reduced it to the condition of a dog, well-accustomed to the whip, which wags its tail when they approve, and only dares to growl and show its teeth—all the more viciously for its constraint towards themselves—at the enormities of others; or like a clock which ticks and strikes when they choose to wind it up, but is as mute and silent as the dead when they do not!

It was a touching, yet beautiful sight, to see the twin brother and sister together; sometimes, on sunny days, walking arm-in-arm,—not far, but in the immediate neigh-

bourhood of Minor Canon Corner. Many, meeting the two and greeting them with earnest cordiality,—for it was quite a matter of competition as to who should show them the most sympathy and kindness—particularly tender-hearted women, would stand still to look after them, as they moved slowly forward. “Poor young things!” such a one would say, with her handkerchief or apron at her eyes, according to her position on the world’s ladder, “Poor young things!”

It was beautiful to see them together, both so much alike and yet so different. Both tall, slender, graceful; the girl, straighter now, for her brother was forced to stoop to rest upon her arm. Both dark-haired and dark-eyed, with the same brilliant colouring on their dusky cheeks. Yet hers was the rich colour of vigorous health, melting imperceptibly back to the delicate ear and rounded throat; his more sharply defined, that crimson tint, so beautiful to look at, and yet so unutterably sad; that vivid colouring with which the most fatal and insidious disease marks its victims, like the red cross of the forester upon the tree doomed to fall. She, nourished upon an inexhaustible source of joy within her, growing every day into more exquisite beauty, and ripening in the

sunshine of warmest and tenderest love, into the fullness and richness of a glorious womanhood ; he, ripening too, but not for earth.

Often, they would walk in silence, each satisfied and happy in the society of the other ; each indulging in dreams of bliss for the future, bliss springing from sources as far apart as earth from heaven. Happy, too, in the friendliness of all they met ; in the beauties of nature, even in her sleeping-time ; in the removal of the heavy cloud which had darkened their sunshine. Sometimes, they would talk—he chiefly, while she would listen. It was one of his chief pleasures to plan her future life, and, with a glad smile of comprehension on his lips, to tell her, that he felt sure that one so beautiful and good would make a happy marriage, and live a happy life ; and the smile would broaden, as he saw the answer to his unspoken question in the deepening of the colour on her cheek. Then, he would speak of their dear friends, and that he knew they would be true to her always ; would compare their happiness now with the desolation of their childhood, and tell her never to forget that all God's decrees are good ; adding fervently, each time, how very, very happy he was, and how devoutly

thankful. And when she, on her side, would talk of his future, and of all that he would accomplish, when she would picture him as a brilliant and successful lawyer, reminding him that there was nothing now to prevent his pursuing his studies under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Chrisparkle, the kindest and best of teachers, he would be silent; only looking up yearningly to the deep blue sky; and if there were a shade like trouble on his face, it was not on his own account. Oh, no! not on his account, only on hers. After all, is it not a most merciful dispensation, blunting the edge of sorrow and preventing that foreshadowing of it, which is the hardest and most terrible to bear, that, where all around can see, love alone is blind.

The end came at last, as it often does in such cases, suddenly and unexpectedly. Neville had seemed particularly bright all day; and, as the weather was mild and sunny, he had, accompanied, of course, by his sister, who hardly ever left him, taken a few steps, about noontide, in the Close. But he soon complained of fatigue, and she led him home again.

When they entered the little sitting-room, arranged especially for them, she noticed how white and wan he looked, and rang for

help. But before it arrived, he had fainted away in her arms. Assisted by the frightened housemaid, Mary (who was only kept back from a fit of hysterics by the terrible look in the dark eyes—a look of fixed determination, which repressed her own agony in this dread moment as decisively as the foolish expression of fear in the maid), she carried him to his bedroom near at hand, and laid him on his bed.

Then, bidding the girl, in a hard, authoritative manner, first inform Mr. Chrisparkle, and then fetch the doctor—a command which the awed maid obeyed without a word—she applied such simple restoratives as she had at hand, with the precision and exactness of a skilful nurse, and without a moment's pause for useless grief. In a few minutes, the Minor Canon, as quiet and self-possessed as she, was there to help her.

Neville opened his eyes at last, and turned them immediately towards his sister, as if the thought of her had never left him during his swoon, and concern for her was the first sentient feeling which he could entertain. He was unable to speak in the first moment of consciousness, but the undying solicitude and love, which could only find expression in his brilliant orbs, lit with a new and unearthly

light, was so moving, that it was more than Mr. Chrisparkle or his mother, who had hastened to the scene, could bear. They both broke into tears at the sight of it.

But his sister met his look with a smile. Heaven knows what it cost her to smile at such a moment, for only Heaven knew what depths of heroism there were in that girlish breast ! Even in mortal agony, worse than that of death—for what was her life to his?—she fiercely excluded all sign of it from her face, which, though white as that of her brother's, looked back at him steadily, with a reassuring smile. To spare his feelings at this supreme moment, she trode down her own mercilessly with a heel of iron.

Neville's feeble voice returned, though they had to bend their heads to hear it, he was understood to express a wish to be left alone with Mr. Chrisparkle. Helena, without a word or sign of remonstrance, obeyed instantly, and followed the loudly-weeping china shepherdess out of the room. Then, pale and rigid as marble, she remained standing on the cold stone floor of the little hall—in spite of the entreaties of Mrs. Chrisparkle that she would come into the drawing-room and warm herself—so as to be near at hand for the re-summons.

At last it came. "Quick, Helena." And she was standing by the bed and looking down upon her dying brother.

For he was dying. That look upon his face was unmistakable, even to a novice in such matters. Calm and sweet, but quite unearthly in its beauty, it seemed as if a reflection of a light from above irradiated and refined its perfect features into the likeness of a saint's. For the battle of life which he had fought out almost to the end, though severe, had been but short, and it was the dawn of victory.

Mr. Chrisparkle was standing beside him, and, as the sister entered, he said, in a clear, earnest voice, first looking at her, so dear to them both, as if she were included in the promise—

"Depart in peace, dear boy ; and may God do so to me, and more also, if I forget."

Then he stooped over him and kissed the pale lips and forehead, clammy with the dews of death, and, withdrawing to the foot of the bed, left the twin sister alone in the place which was hers of right, and into which no other dared intrude.

She kissed him, too, without a sob or tear, and knelt down beside him. His wondrous eyes, the counterpart of hers in form and

colour, settled finally upon her loved face, and remained there, steadfast and immovable, full of undying affection, until the light faded out of them on earth for ever, to be relit in heaven.

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“Sept, my dear,” said the china shepherdess, opening the door of his little book-room, where he was sitting alone in the gloom, for no lamp was lit there, and the neglected fire had burnt itself out, “Sept, my dear, I’m sorry to disturb you, for I know how sad you are, but I can’t help it.”

There was nothing to be seen of the china shepherdess but a dim outline of a little figure in the doorway, and her voice sounded strangely muffled, as if she had wrapped it up. Perhaps she had, because, when her son took notice of this unusual circumstance, she accounted for it by a severe cold in the head, and reproved him, somewhat sharply, for his neglect of the fire.

Oh, china shepherdess, china shepherdess! Is it a cold in the head which compels thee to throw thy loving arms round thy son’s neck, and, laying thy ruffled cap and dishevelled head upon his broad breast, sob and weep as if thou hadst only begun, instead of leaving off?

Is it a cold in the head which causes thy lips to burn so feverishly when they touch his, and thy eyes to overflow like living wells of water? A loving heart, china shepherdess, is never a thing to be ashamed of, and is worth a king's ransom any day; and a contrite spirit, china shepherdess, a king's crown!

But the dear old lady strove, not very successfully, to restrain herself, and, much interrupted by sobs, explained her mission. Helena had been carried out senseless from the room, where the dead body lay, by the doctor, who had arrived when all was over, and laid on her own bed, where she had been carefully tended until she recovered consciousness; upon which, she had turned her face to the wall, still tearless, and had shown such an evident wish to be alone, that they had yielded to this mute entreaty, and left her to herself.

Once or twice since then, Rosa had crept to the door of her room and listened; but hearing no sound, had concluded that Nature was soothing the girl with her unfailing narcotic, and that she had forgotten her grief for the time in sleep.

At last, Rosa, too anxious and disturbed to be quite satisfied, had ventured to quietly open the door and peep in, when, to her

terror and dismay, she discovered that the bed was empty, and Helena gone. They had sought her everywhere, and found her at last in her brother's room, lying upon the bed where he lay, and embracing the dead body.

“And oh, Sept!” said the china shepherdess, bursting into tears again, “she pays no attention to what we say, and looks so beautiful and yet so terrible, that it almost breaks our hearts. So I came to you to help us, for if you can't, no one can.”

Stretched out upon the bed where they had placed him until the last bed was ready, lay the dead boy, his hands folded upon his breast, as if in prayer; the last heavenly smile, which had beamed upon his sister, still lingering on his lips; and the long, black lashes of the eyes which had been closed after death, sweeping the pure, pale cheek; and, by his side, one arm thrown around him, and the other hanging listless beside her, lay Helena.

The feeble winter sun had set long ago, and the room would have been quite dark but for the light given by a lamp which Mrs. Chrisparkle had set upon a table by the bedside, and which shed its rays direct upon the two beautiful faces—never more alike than now.

It was a sight beautiful beyond expression, yet awe-striking, and almost terrible, too; because the living part of the picture looked so like death, and the dead, with that sweet smile upon his face, that wondrous calm, those softly-folded hands, might have been only sleeping, and dreaming happy dreams. And he *was* only sleeping, although the radiant eyes would reopen, not to time, but to eternity.

The girl's long hair had escaped from the confining comb, and fell down, one thick, dusky mass, around her form; her face was as white and still as the face of the dead, and her cheek, pressing his, so like in contour and colour, that they seemed to melt into one another, and to be, not two, but one.

Yet there was a look of pain and suffering in her face, absent from his, which was full of saintly peace; and of unrest in hers, while in his was perfect rest. Yet notwithstanding this difference, and though her bosom rose and fell slightly—the only token of life—while his was still, they might have been supposed by a casual observer to be either both sleeping or both dead.

“Helena,” said the Minor Canon, gently, advancing towards the bedside, and speaking in a low, yet impressive voice, “get up, dear

girl, and come to us. You have been taking a last farewell of the dead brother—only gone before, remember that—and it is natural and excusable that you should do so; but it must not last too long. It will injure your health and augment your grief unnecessarily. Get up, dear girl, and come to us who love you—love you dearly—and let us comfort you.”

She had started at the sound of the speaker's voice—that dear voice!—and shivered slightly, but she remained silent; only nestling closer to the dead brother, as if beseeching him to let her stay there.

“Helena,” continued the Revd. Septimus, more emphatically still, and with a tinge of reproach in his voice, “can not you, always so brave, be brave even now? To remain where you are is impossible, and must do you cruel harm. Try to remember what the dear departed would have wished! Try to remember that he is not lost, but only gone to where you, in the fullness of time, will follow him! Exercise the noble self-command now, which you have shown so often! For the sake of the dead, for the sake of the living, who suffer, in seeing you suffer, rise superior to this momentary weakness, I beseech you, Helena!”

His appeal was not without effect, though

without the effect he desired. She did not attempt to rise even yet ; but she opened her dark eyes and fixed them upon him, as if to beg him not to be displeased with her, for she could not help it.

Then, at the sight of his troubled face, worn with anxiety on her account, the frozen fount of her tears began to thaw. Slowly creeping out from under her dark lashes, one or two large drops rolled down her face.

Now, Heaven be praised for this at least ; the healing tears began to flow ! But that was not enough ; the Minor Canon raised his voice again, this time with a sternness which alarmed his mother, and which she deemed almost cruel.

But it was the physician's skilful hand which wounds to heal, and which dares not hesitate or shrink from the work it has to do, because it must inflict, temporarily, extra pain.

" This is not only weak, Helena," he began again, " but it is also wrong. You expose yourself, unnecessarily, to risk and danger, and by so doing, increase our anxiety a hundred-fold. You even rob this room of its sanctity, by making it—an abode of saintly peace—into a scene of conflict. By the authority given me by your dead brother,

just before he died ; by the authority which I possess as your spiritual guide and counsellor, I bid you struggle against a weakness unworthy of you, and get up ! I command you, Helena ! ”

The china shepherdess stood aghast at the tone of her son's voice, and at his words, which seemed to her almost heartless at such a moment. But he knew his power over her ; he had not miscalculated the effect of his words. His severity, prompted by tenderest love, succeeded in controlling her, where all persuasion would have failed.

It gave her back what she had lost, her own proud self-possession, and, as if it were his indisputable right to command, and her, as indisputable, duty to obey, she rose instantly, laid her cheek for the last time against the cold cheek of her brother, and turned to leave the room. But, in the very act of doing so, she stood still, trembling from head to foot, raised her eyes to his imploringly, as if beseeching him to forgive her, for though her will was conquered, her bodily strength failed, and fell, for the second time insensible, into his outstretched arms.

Carrying her, as a man carries his most precious treasure, he took her upstairs to the room which she occupied with Rosa, and laid

her upon a sofa. Then, before leaving her to the tender care of his mother, and her little fluttering, trembling friend, he stooped low over her, as if to contemplate once more her lovely face, every outline of which was graven on his heart, and murmured a few words, the purport of which his mother could not catch.

There were tears in his honest blue eyes when he raised them again, and one had fallen upon the pale sweet face of the senseless girl; but they were tears of devout and grateful happiness, for he knew now that his love—his first and only love—had obtained Heaven's sanction. He knew that she loved him, this matchless girl, as he had yearned to be loved. He knew, and thanked God for the knowledge, that no mortal could wean away her affections, or take her from him any more.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. AND MRS. BAZZARD.

It was Christmas Eve again; just one year since the night when Edwin Drood had disappeared; and the wind, howling and roaring outside Mr. Grewgious' house in Staple Inn, seemed to be celebrating the anniversary of its wild revel on that occasion.

Mr. Grewgious was alone, sitting in his arm-chair, close drawn up before a famous fire, upon the top of which blazed a log, which would have done honour to any social circle in the wide city, and which, to tell the truth, appeared rather thrown away on one old solitary man.

Perhaps Mr. Grewgious felt it so, for he murmured apologetically, as he once more replenished the fire from a heap of similar logs at his side: "I ain't often extravagant, but it's Christmas time, and I do like to see 'em blazing up so high. It fills the empty room with company, and brightens me up and takes me back to old times when I, too, at this blessed season, saw bright faces round me, and heard sweet, silvery laughter."

Goodness ! how the fire danced up the broad chimney on hearing this, and lit up the room, and roared a defiance to the wind outside, and sung out in the jolliest of voices : “ You are right, old fellow ! You and I will make merry between us ! Begone dull care ! ” until the wind incensed, rushed to silence it, bringing a fierce army of raindrops as a body-guard, which rattled their small artillery against the window panes, and threatened to break them in, and murder the fire upon its own hearthstone.

But little the two cared for that. Mr. Grewgious laughed, and the fire roared afresh at the impotent fury of the attackers, whose futile endeavours only enhanced the comfort within by comparison with the inclemency without.

There was a table—a little round table—close by Mr. Grewgious ; and on it stood a bottle, and a glass, and a sugar-basin, filled to the brim with white sugar, and lemons, too, some squeezed to death, and some delighting the eye still with their plump juiciness ; and there was a kettle on the hob, and there was every reason to believe that Mr. Grewgious had not only been mixing, but also imbibing certain glasses of fragrant punch ; for his face was flushed, his eye bright, and the extreme

tip of his nose—but dear me! why descend to calumny? that was, of course, only the reflection of the fire.

He was drowsy, too; so drowsy, that his eyes began to close of their own accord, without in the least consulting him; and his head began to bob backwards and forwards and he began to dream. It must have been a dream, for suddenly the whole room, empty before, except that he was there, and the lusty fire, became full of people.

People of all ages; from the snowy-haired grandmother, seated close to the fire, to the flaxen-haired urchin at her knee. People, as unlike each other as you from Adam; but all alike in one respect; for, whether their mouths are guarded by pearly teeth, or are toothless, they are all widened to a universal smile.

He is there, too—he, the dreamer, though not in his old place by the fire, but on a modest chair behind the door—and smiling as hard as any of the rest. Not as old as he was just now, though little different externally: the same unfinished face; the same shambling gait; the same fatal propensity for inevitable contact with any breakable object; the same smooth head, nevertheless, always wanting smoothing; the same short-sighted eyes.

But he has forgotten all those unpleasant attributes now. Who could help forgetting; *vis-à-vis* to the sweetest, cherriest cheeked, and rosebuddest-lipped little fairy ever seen? Who could think of anything disagreeable, at the sight of that radiant little face, smiling out of a shower of dark-brown curls?

That evening—that Christmas Eve, long years before—a star rose brightly in his gloomy sky; a star unattainable and unattained, but the guiding star of his existence, nevertheless.

Why does the smile broaden, and break into peals of laughter? Why do they all look at *him*, and laugh more loudly still? Why does the pretty fairy utter that delicious little scream; then clap her tiny hands, and laugh the silverest laugh imaginable—music sweeter in his ears than any earth can yield?

There is a sort of platform at one end of the room, and on it a chair, whereupon sits a beauteous being in blue, who might have been supposed to be the Goddess of Beauty, but for that fatal comparison with the other.

The blue beauty has just received two articles from an attendant sprite, and is holding them up to the view of the others, while she inquires in a sing-song voice, like an incantation, of a young man kneeling blind-

folded at her feet: "Here are two things, and two very pretty things, and what must the owners of these pretty things do?" (to redeem them). "Dance a polka twenty times round the room to a tune which I will whistle," is the answer.

And why, oh, why, on hearing this decree, do the whole assembly turn their laughing eyes on him, as if by one consent, and peal out again? Why do certain individuals stamp with their feet as if they were suddenly gone mad, and, leaning forward, grasp themselves as if attacked with spasms in the stomach?

Why does the young lady in blue say, when she recovers breath, to the blind-folded young man, "Go along with you, Dick, you must have peeped, and seen who it was, you deceitful creature?"

Why does Dick answer, after a violent stomach attack, "'Pon my word! I'd have made it a doosed bit stronger, if I had. I'd have made it a kiss, Clara, 'pon my soul, a kiss?"

Why do they all sway backwards and forwards, like a corn-field in the wind, on hearing this?

He—the he of long ago—is still cogitating, and asking himself these questions, when he

is aroused by a smack upon his back—such a hearty smack that it penetrates his coat, waistcoat, and other nameless garments, and makes him unnecessarily warm—unnecessarily, for he wasn't cold before.

He looks up, with a remonstrance on his lips, at a laughing face, and pert little moustache, so widened with mirth, that every hair appears to stand out separate.

“Look alive, old chap! didn't you hear your sentence? Didn't you recognise your pocket-knife, and missy's little glove. She's waiting for you, and so are we; and I only wish I had the luck to stand in your shoes, that I do, old fellow!”

Then he feels himself dragged forward to where she is standing, her rosy cheeks rosier than ever, her little mouth trying to pout, as if it would say, “I don't approve of this at all;” but, catching the mirthful infection, not being able to accomplish it for ever so; and his right hand is round her waist (such a waist, his arm could go round it twice almost!) and his other is clasping hers (such a warm, little, nestling, trembling hand!), and one pretty stray curl tickles his cheek (surely never man was tickled so enchantingly before), and the whistler strikes up right gallantly.

Round the room they go, her fluttering little heart beating almost audibly, her warm breath upon his neck. Round the room they whirl, encircled by a crowd of applauding spectators, to the time of the mischievous whistler, ever faster and faster. He, the man whom no master had been able to teach the art, learning it from this little mistress like a miracle.

Round and round they go, his head now in sharp contact with the marble mantelpiece, at which the fire and the chandelier repeat themselves a hundred times; his leg now entangled in an obtrusive chair, which goes down with a crash.

Round they go, amid a perfect shout of applause. Then he sees a red mountain incautiously protrude itself into their magic circle, and into that mountain they rush. It is a violent collision; the mountain reels, staggers, finally succumbs like the chair, and goes down too.

The whistler ceases, and his little partner is torn away from him, while they all gather round the red mountain aghast. He, with wildly palpitating heart, draws near it with the others.

It reveals itself to his astonished vision as a stout lady, in a red gown, with a still redder

face. The laughter has ceased, too, for a moment, but the stout lady proving only astonished and not hurt, it peals out afresh. He withdraws to a corner of the room, and sits down to cool himself, for his blood is coursing through his veins as it never coursed before.

He has tasted, for the first time, of the intoxicating cup of bliss, and he longs for more. He wonders what would have happened—whether he would have been able to bear it—if Dick *had* peeped and “made it a kiss, Clara, made it a kiss?”

He is aroused from his reverie by a soft, low, thrilling laugh—a laugh which makes every fibre in him tremble. He looks across the room to the spot from whence it issues. She, his little partner, is sitting there on an ottoman, with flushed cheeks and tumbled hair; and a young man is standing by her side, looking down upon her.

It is a friend of his, and he knows him well. A tall, handsome, dark-eyed young man—such a contrast to himself. Oh, how the thought of his own unattractiveness, which never troubled him before, how it hurts him now!

The young man, his friend, seems to be speaking earnestly, almost reprovably, to

the laughing girl. She laughs once more, a little defiantly, then pouts and shakes back her ruffled curls, then plays nervously with her small hands, then raises her bright eyes, full of tears, beseechingly to his.

He had been tempted, a moment before, to dash across the room, seize his friend by the throat, and hurl him from her; but at the sight of her pleading face, he pauses; a great sadness blots out a radiant vista; he has quaffed, enjoyed one deep draught from a cup, which many never taste, for the first time in his life. Is it also for the last?

He sees his friend take the little hand, held out to him in frank penitence; he sees his handsome face glow with pride and joy; he sees him raise it to his lips and kiss it fervently. And he turns to leave the room, which darkens before his very eyes, and grows cold and dull.

Rat—tat—tat !

Mr. Grewgious opened his eyes and looked about him, confused. The wind was roaring outside as fiercely as ever, but the fire sent forth no note of defiance, and the kettle upon the hob had ceased to sing. The room was in deep shadow, and, as the rain rattled once more upon the window-panes, he sighed and shivered. How cold and dull it was!

how lonely he felt! what a dreary life was his—dreary and desolate!

Rat—tat! Rat—tat—tat!

Could it be a real visitor at the door knocking, and no spirit rapping? Or could it be his tedious and gloomy ancestor, P.J.T., who left his initials to ornament this forlorn place when he was gone?

It was Christmas Eve—the night of all nights for a spectral visitant to a lonely man. Never mind! let him rap as long as he liked; it was no business of his; let him rap till the cock should crow in Christmas morning. So Mr. Grewgious only stirred up the fire, and laid a fresh log upon the top of it.

But the rapping did not cease, disconcerted by this indifference. On the contrary, it increased in vehemence, and presently the handle of the door was turned with an impatient hand, and some one entered. Mr. Grewgious, notwithstanding his *nonchalance*, partly assumed, felt compelled to turn round at this; and what he saw so impressed him, that he remained in that position, incapable of resuming his former one.

For it was a female figure, or one attired in female garb, which stood upon his threshold. A long mantle of indefinite colour enveloped the form, and a bonnet and green

veil covered the head and face, which might have belonged, for ought these articles of dress revealed them, to a fairy or a ghoul. Still clinging obstinately to his first opinion that no mortal would or could invade his sanctuary on that day or at that hour, the Collector of Rents murmured—

“Avaunt, P.J.T., if it is thou who hast assumed this mummery, for I am in no humour for a Practical Joke To-night.”

The figure subsided into a chair, with many a sigh and many a groan, and, collapsing instantly, laid a spectral hand upon its heart.

That is to say *spectral* because of the weirdness of its general appearance, and because spectral sounds so much better, and infinitely more attractive at this late hour. Otherwise, a hand as like that of a mortal's as a hand well could be, with all its outlines concealed in a woollen glove of very indifferent make.

Mr. Grewgious was still gazing at it in fascination, for the action seemed unpleasantly familiar to him, when the door was again pushed open, and another phantom entered—a phantom, for the same reason that the hand was spectral.

This second apparition made a low, theatrical bow, with tremendous flourish, ran

a lanky hand, much adorned with jewellery of suspicious value, through its long hair, fixed its dark, lustreless eyes upon the fire, and uttered a heartrending sigh.

Mr. Grewgious' heart sank into unknown regions as he recognised this new-comer; for it was his long-lost Unity—Bazzard, or Bazzard's ghost.

Good gracious! was he come to resume his old place, vacant once more? Notwithstanding his reverence for genius, Mr. Grewgious ejaculated, as the thought arose—

“Heaven preserve us!”

He was trying to utter a welcome, when the figure in the chair, which had been uninterruptedly gasping ever since its entrance, gave utterance to these words: “I told 'ee that the wind, and the rain outside in the court, and them stairs would be the death of me, and so they will.” Here the figure gasped anew, but more feebly, and clutched at that part of the mantle under which its heart, if it possessed any, must have palpitated, still more vehemently, and collapsed more completely.

Now this was exceedingly alarming, and more so because Mr. Grewgious had a terrible suspicion that he recognised the voice. Moreover, he had no idea to whom the words were

addressed, whether to himself, or to Bazzard, who took no notice of them. Moreover, it would be extremely unpleasant if the figure were to die, even under covering of its mantle, in his sanctuary. Why, even P. J. T., Preternaturally Jeering Them, would have been preferable to this.

But no explanation, or anything but sighs, issuing further from under the veil, Mr. Grewgious, after a helpless stare at it, turned to Bazzard who, ever since his melodramatic entrance, had been glowering gloomily at the fire, without uttering a word.

“Bazzard, my good fellow, this is an unexpected—a—pleasure (his voice, more honest than his conventional words, faltered here), and an honour, I am sure. May I beg you to take a chair, and introduce me to the—a—lady.”

Before Bazzard, in answer to this address, had finished his theatrical preparations for speech; to wit: advancing with indescribable grace towards Mr. Grewgious, as if he had been an over-full house; then, stopping precipitately, as if he were close to the foot lights; then, raising warningly and menacingly his right hand, and particularly the forefinger thereof; then, elegantly inserting two fingers of his left hand into his waist-

coat; then, frowning fiercely and appallingly; then, rolling his eyes, so as to show as much as possible of the whites of them; then, finally, settling them upon a point over Mr. Grewgious' head, about half-way between floor and ceiling, as if his eyes, as a matter of course, could not be directed permanently towards the pit, but sought the boxes as their natural resting-place—before all these preliminaries had been discharged (tending, by the way, so completely to bewilder Mr. Grewgious, as to render it doubtful whether he would have retained sufficient sense to understand the words when they came) an interruption occurred.

It was a sound resembling a snort of defiance from the veiled figure, followed by an energetic throwing back of the veil, and a disclosure of the features it had concealed. Mr. Grewgious, abandoning Bazzard in the very act of opening his mouth to the boxes, had turned at the sound, and now stood petrified as effectually as if the green veil had mercifully hidden until now the face of a Medusa.

For it was the Billickin! Wrath and indignation flaming in her eye, and a hand upon her heart.

“No, sir,” she exclaimed, with her baleful

eye upon him. "Do not stoop to say, 'Introduce me to this lady.' Let us scorn deceptions and equivocations! Let us avoid evasions! Let us say, bold as brass: the presence of this respectable female is unpleasant to us. It reminds us of a time when we did not hact hup to our reppytation. That's what it reminds us of."

Mr. Grewgious, still rigid and immovable—seemingly having lost almost the power to breathe—making no answer to this tirade, the Billickin, first laughing hysterically, then sobbing wildly, continued—

"O, where, where," she ejaculated, faintly, "where is my ridicule? There's a pocket-handkercher in it. O, why did I, full of faith in my fellow-man, leave it in the 'ackney coach? Why did not a merciful Providence forwarn me that my feelings would be that trampled on, that I should need it? Why didn't I bring a smelling-bottle?"

Here the Billickin, in lieu of the missing article, buried her face, and wiped her streaming nose in her green veil, and rocked herself backwards and forwards in bitterness of spirit; while Bazzard, with a hand in his flowing locks, glowered once more gloomily at the fire. Neither he nor Mr. Grewgious venturing to reply to these numerous ques-

tions poured forth by the injured lady, her tears dried up under the fire of her righteous wrath, and she fell (as the phrase is) tooth and nail upon Bazzard who, to judge by his indifference to all going on around him, and by his wrapt contemplation of the fire, was already wandering anew in the mazes of fancy, and gathering there, if not wool, at least continuous "Thorns" wherewith to prick posterity.

Drying her eyes in her veil, and emerging therefrom exceedingly green, not only from rancor, but from the colour of that article, which was not "fast," she adjured that immortal genius, in a tone of voice so sarcastically sharp as to penetrate even to the groves wherein he was meandering, and cause him to come out into every-day life with a start, "to 'ave the goodness to inform Mr. Grewgious, here present, whether he was married to her yesterday morning in the Church of St. George the Martyr, Bloomsbury Square, or whether he was not?"

"Married!" exclaimed Mr. Grewgious, recovering his breath and power of speech again at this counter shock. "Dear me! Who could have imagined it! Allow me to heartily con—"

But before he had time to conclude his

sentence, the Billickin, or, to speak more correctly (if, as her question would seem to imply, she had really changed her name for that of the pseudo-clerk) Mrs. Bazzard, interrupted him—

“Begging your parding, sir, which the question at present under consideration, and which I addresses to that man there, a starin’ at the fire, like a—like a howl,” said the B., “is, till answered, furrin to congratulations, and I repeats it. I therefore axes you, Eddard Bazzard, which was meant to have been christened Eddard Jenkins Bazzard, which the foregoing was my own name before I was married to my fust, and which was left out owing to unexpected wind in the stummick, in the church, causing you to scream that awful, that the clergyman—a young unmarried man, not accustomed to the sound, which to fathers of families is as familiar as their own voices—got confused, and left it clean out according, as you are aweer on; and which is my own cousin, being the son of my great uncle’s second wife’s daughter, on the mother’s side: was you married to me yesterday morning, in the Church of St. George the Martyr, Bloomsbury Square, *by* a clergyman, *before* the altar, and *in presence* of witnesses; or air you going to commit bigamy,

which is transportation for life, in the presence of this gentleman, and deny it ? ”

There being no female present, with the exception of her indignant self, and no clergyman to copulate them, if there had been, that allusion to bigamy was rather far-fetched on the part of the B., but, bless you ! it was only thrown in for effect, and it produced it. Even Bazzard looked aghast, and Mr. Grewgious appeared as shame-faced and confounded as if he had been that moment detected in the very act.

Bazzard, subsiding again after the first alarm into profound and gloomy melancholy, responded in a subdued tone, to the effect that he hadn't a been a denying of it, had he ? and that he wasn't a going to deny it, was he ? and became anew lost in reverie.

“ Oh, he acknowledges, he owns to it ! ” continued the B., melting into tears again, as if it would have been far more agreeable to her feelings if he had denied it. “ He avows that I agreed to find him in board and lodging for nothing, and no hextrys, for the time of his nateral life ; but he forgits that it was on mutual terms, and that I was to have a protector against a wile world in return for it. He sees me trampled upon, and trode upon, and swore at, and spit at, and denied all

knowledge of," said the excited lady, "and he never lifts a hand, nor says a word to hinder it. Oh, oh, oh, there's a 'usband for you! There's a 'at and stick in the passage constant for you! There's a willin for you! There's a—(here the B. made a pause, not because her anger was exhausted, but for want of an appropriate word, ending finally with) a raving, roaring lunatic for you, a glaring at the fire!"

"My dear madam! My dearest madam!" interposed Mr. Grewgious, in a perfect agony lest her raised voice should be heard outside, and attract the attention of his neighbours. "It is true that for one little moment I failed to recognise you under that veil; but the first glimpse of your—your expressive countenance was sufficient to reveal to me your—your respected self—your eminently respected self," repeated the old man, growing inventive in his desperation; "why, who, having once set eyes upon a face so replete with—a—character, could fail to be able to point it out among a multitude, unveiled. And, even before you uncovered it, that highly characteristic action of yours (laying his hand upon his own heart), that touching and constant appeal to an organ which is the representative to us of all the softer emotions—or why

the phrase expressing so much in so little 'all heart?'—had already suggested you to my imagination."

Here the B., showing signs of an intention to put in her oar again, Mr. Grewgious struggled hard to get first into a smoother current.

"Pray, dearest madam," he continued hurriedly, "allow me to persuade you to draw nearer to the fire, where I hope you will do me the honour of permitting me, in your company, to drink the health of yourself, and your eminently esteemed husband, in a bumper."

"And well I remember," said the B., softening, "your calling of him a Unicorn, which was 'ighly flattering, and awoke in myself similar sentiments."

Mr. Grewgious had no remembrance of ever having spoken of Mr. Bazzard under this, to say the least, dubious cognomen, but seeing that his efforts had been successful, that the storm was lulling, and that fair vessel the B., sailing in comparatively quiet water, he went on delighted.

"There's a kettle on the hob, and a jar of fresh water in the next room; there's a bottle of excellent Jamaica rum upon the table, and lemons (beaming at them) eminently

juicy, as I can testify to from my own experience. Pray, let me mix, and pray do me the honour to partake."

To Mr. Grewgious' astonishment and dismay, the B. broke out once more into a flood of tears, but they were as soft and gentle as summer rain, and washed away the remnants of her wrath. Emerging presently from her veil, greener than ever, she irradiated the room, so to speak, with her smiles.

"And what did it matter," as she said to them, when Bazzard alluded to this unusual colouring, "what did it matter what hue adorned the face, so long as it were not the hue of shame, and so long as the heart was green and in the right place? Which hers, she was happy to say (pointing it out) was, and ever should be. And she was willing to confess, being of that candid nature, which was above the meanness of trying to conceal a fault, that if her character possessed any blemish, it was this (though even considered by many, only as an excess of virtue): that in her pursuit of truth, she was inclined, in her too eager ardour, sometimes to go beyond it; she abhorred circumventions, and thanked Evin that in this one respect she was but mortal, and liable to err. She begged it to be understood that in

speaking of being trode upon, and spit upon, and swore at, she had been only figurative, though, indeed, her feelings were that sensitive, that a crooked look could wound 'em like a knife, and a zephyr blast 'em. She see now, that with one exception,—and why relude to exceptions, when there is no rule without 'em !—that Mr. Grewgious, not only had the figure and the apparel of a gentleman, but the soul of one. She would put away all false pride therefore, for all falseness she loathed, and *would* partake. Bazzard also should partake. She hoped for the honour of mankind, that he had been upon the point of knocking down Mr. Grewgious, when circumstantial evidence had been that strong agin him, that even she was led astray ; and she was thankful for the honour of truth that that intention had been nipped in the bud, in consequence of satisfactory explanations. She hoped Bazzard would never forget that it was his duty to knock down all mankind if they insulted her, and to thrash 'em to death arterwards. Else, why a husband ? She would not disturb the 'eavenly 'armony of the present occasion, by reluding to a young man with blue spectacles, who had occupied her lodgings under a false name and false pretences (shuddering), and which had

come into a property, as she'd heered, and left 'em for better ones—though whether only better as regards the price, or as regards the comfort, was another matter, and she only hoped that he would get his bit of cold meat and cup o' tea as regular there as he had halways had them in Bloomsbury Square. She wouldn't remind Mr. Grewgious that he had been the party to introduce the young man, and that as she had expected to have had him as a lodger for many years, her losses were consequently immense; not to mention the sleepless nights she certainly would have had, if a guardian hangel had whispered in her confiding ear that he was an himposter, and which would have ruined her constitution. She would never be persuaded to advance a claim for reparation on Mr. Grewgious on that account, although as an unmarried man without incumbrances, he hadn't ought to grudge it to the widder (as had been) and (but that she had no children) to the orphins. She hadn't come there that evening with no such intentions. Evin forbid! She had merely put it to Bazzard, feelingly put it to Bazzard, that for an old friend of both his and hers, and which, with but one exception, and why relude to that? had always acted as a gentleman, to first hear of the 'appy

ewent through the cold medium of a newspaper, would be next door to an insult. They had driven to the lodge in a 'ackney coach, and forced an entrance against porter, rain and wind, and she was thankful that she had made the effort. She was sure Mr. Grewgious was not the man to forget it. Rum punch, she concluded, was, when judiciously mixed according to the receipt laid before them, not only warming to the stomach, but also to the 'eart, and she *would* partake."

So they all drew round the fire, upon which Mr. Grewgious threw a huge log, and their host began to mix. Presently a fragrant promise of a goodly beverage filled the room, and shortly after, the promise was more than verified. They all partook, and their spirits rose in doing so. They all partook, and toasted the bridegroom and toasted the bride, and strange events occurred. Mrs. Bazzard's tongue ceased to wag, and her head began to do so in its stead, and her eyes to wink at the fire. Mr. Bazzard's stiff tongue was loosened, and he emerged from the groves of fancy, and began to use it in an everyday manner and about everyday things. He spoke of his "Thorn of Anxiety" with resignation. The world, he said, to

speak in the words of Galileo, had waited many thousand years for a Bazzard, and he could wait a hundred years for a reader and appreciator. The time would come—oh, yes, the time would come, when he would be read and appreciated. He would not slacken in his zeal, no, never! but would continue to fabricate “Thorns” to prick mankind. He hoped that at the end of his labours, he would have completed a bed of them, in which posterity might lie, and bless his memory. The laurel crown which envy, jealousy and malignity had combined together to deprive him of, during his lifetime, would be laid upon his BIER. He was thankful that this certainty remained, to give him strength to persevere.

After another glass of punch, after which Mrs. Bazzard was seen to give up all attempt at winking, and close her eyes for good, and heard to snore terrifically, her lord grew still more communicative. He confessed that his many attempts to bring his “Thorn” upon the stage, had resulted in the almost total expenditure of his patrimony; although, as he said with maudlin tears in his dull eyes, its success would have been certain, and would have repaid him a hundred fold. He himself had practised the part of the hero of the piece, and had been quite shattered by its exquisite pathos. His friends had been

unanimous in declaring it a *ne plus ultra*. But what did that avail, he inquired dejectedly, so long as the various managers of the various theatres were imbeciles and unable to appreciate its innate superiority?

He confessed, further, reassured by the depth and intensity of the snores uttered by his better half, that he had been induced to take the step of marrying, from the dilemma he had been in, as to what other step were possible. She had made him advances in years past, and, on his return, had consented to become his wife, on condition of his immediately handing over the remnants of his patrimony, agreeing (to make use of her own words) to provide him with board and lodging, gratis, for the term of his natural life. "And what does it signify," concluded Bazzard, apostrophising the fire, and seeming to threaten it with his raised right hand, "Genius has no time for Love! The wings of Pegasus must not be clipped, in order for him to repose on the domestic hearth! He must spread his pinions, and fly upward, never slackening, into those regions which are his especial privilege. He must cast his anchor in the sun, so to speak, and look down from that elevated spot with a ske—orn—ful smile upon a benighted world."

Suiting the action to the word, Bazzard

smote his thigh, and looked at Mr. Grewgious with such intense scorn, that that worthy gentleman was reduced to the necessity of casting down his eyes, and smoothing his abashed head. He was quite relieved when Bazzard, drawing forth a very showy watch, pronounced "that he must knock up the 'old one' and get her back to Bloomsbury Square as quickly as possible, for it was close upon midnight," indeed, he had been already reflecting with some uneasiness, on the impropriety of a snoring female, even in company of her husband, spending the night in his office, and the surprise which his neighbours would inevitably feel, when she should emerge in the morning.

The process of knocking up the "old one" proving difficult, Mr. Grewgious left Bazzard to accomplish it, and hurried across the court, and through the porter's gate into Holborn, to look out for a passing cab, and hail it. After a few minutes of waiting, he was successful in finding one, and returned, just as Bazzard had tucked his conjugal partner under his arm and was issuing from the office door. The B. was dissolved in tears, and her hand clutched her heart, to which she was referring in broken accents. But she was so very indistinct, and the time so pressing, that

they had conveyed her across the court into the cab, before she had fully divulged her sentiments. Once deposited there, she appeared to forget them, and sunk again into slumber as profound, and snored as lustily, as if it had never been interrupted.

With a final “good-night” to Bazzard, Mr. Grewgious recrossed the court, re-entered his office, and, feeling little inclined to sleep, sat down once more before the fire to reflect on this strange visit. But from reflection he passed to dreaming before he was aware, and fancied himself in the company of P. J. T.—both of them very much the worse for liquor—and that the latter was attired in a mantle of a nondescript colour, and a green veil, which he was explaining, had been the newest fashion for old, dried up bachelors in the year of our Lord seventeen forty-seven.

CHAPTER X.

A SOLEMN MESSENGER.

WHETHER the preparations for Edwin Drood's departure for Egypt occupied more time than he, in his first resolution to start at once, had considered necessary; or whether poor Neville's death had caused them to be delayed; or whether, finally, anything else had interposed to retard them, were open questions. Certain it was, however, that Christmas had come and gone; that the baby year had cast off its swaddling clothes, and was beginning to "feel its legs," and assert its independence; that, in a word, the first month of its existence was drawing to its end, and he was still in England. There were so many consultations to be had with Mr. Chrisparkle, whose clear head and sound common-sense were quite invaluable to him; there were visits to be paid, and good-byes to give and take, and congratulations to receive; there were endless communications to be made to Rosa; there were, in short, a thousand and one arguments to be taken advantage of, to delay that last fatal step of going away, and leaving her, perhaps for ever. For

what chance, what possible chance, would remain to him, to win once more the girl whom he had trifled with and lost, when he was far away in that distant land? And he loved her now with an intensity of passion, so intertwined with every fibre of his being, that to part from her without hope was like tearing the soul out of his body, and a mortal agony.

He had told her all the incidents of his rescue, and of the noble woman who had doubly saved him; and she had listened with sweet, sisterly interest, with tears of pity for him, and tears of admiration for poor Madge. With all her ready sympathy enlisted for the lonely girl, she had promised him to seek her out in London, and be a friend to her, for his sake. But when, animated by her ardour, and encouraged by her simple candour, he had ventured tremblingly to approach a step nearer, and try to disclose the real nature of his sentiments towards her, an invincible dread of losing, in the grasp for more, that sweet sisterly love which was so freely given him, froze the words upon his lips, and seemed to blast his heart.

But the dreaded moment of departure could not possibly be postponed for ever, and the time came when no excuse more was to be

found for delay ; when everything was ready, and he must go. He had been spending the day in Minor Canon Corner, and now, as evening drew on, he rose to take a final leave. He would remain a few days more in London, and intended to go and see Madge, to whom he had written frequently since his re-establishment in his rights ; but this was his last visit to Cloisterham, before quitting it and his country, possibly never to return.

It had been a sad day to all of them, and no one wondered to see the tears shining brightly in Rosa's eyes, as he held out his hand to grasp hers. The china shepherdess was weeping too, and even Helena, whose own deep deep sorrow had only rendered her more sympathising than before with the woes of others, turned aside her head to conceal one or two drops, which coursed slowly down her cheek.

“ Rosa,” he said hoarsely, bending to her ear, “ come out to the garden gate with me ; I have something to tell you—something I *must* say to you before I go ; and say to you alone.”

It was the sudden impulse of the moment, the grasp of a drowning man at a straw. Before he submitted to his fate, and sank into an abyss of despair, he would make certain

that nothing could have saved him. She turned deadly pale, but followed him without a word.

It was touching to see—rent and torn as he was by the vehement struggle within himself—how the giddy, thoughtless boy of a year ago, now thought for her. The air was keen and frosty out of doors, and he seized a hat and shawl which hung in the little hall, and placing the hat upon her head, wrapped the shawl closely round her. She was perfectly passive in his hands, letting him do as he would, and thus they went out together. The others remained behind. It was natural that these two, so closely connected from childhood, and who had both suffered so much from the same cause, should not be content with a formal leave-taking in the presence of others, but should wish to interchange a last word alone. So, even that stickler for propriety, the discreet china shepherdess, saw them pass through the gate into the Close, without uneasiness or surprise.

The sun was setting behind the house they had left in Minor Canon Corner, and the whole western sky was bright and glowing from its parting caress; but the east, towards which their faces were turned, had no share in this glory, and was sharp, cold and grey,

while the wind, which had been easterly all day, came towards them, not with a rush, but slowly, as if malignantly determined to make the most of its opportunity, and nip them mercilessly.

“Rosa,” said the young man, passionately, bending down over her, “I cannot part from you like this—cannot, *cannot*. Have you no eyes to see that the sisterly affection you have offered me is either too much, or infinitely too little? Can you not understand that it is no mild, fraternal affection with which I regard you, but with that all-powerful, all-sorbing love, which a man only feels, only dares to feel, towards the woman he would make his wife?”

She tried to speak, but the words died away upon her lips, and she only shook her head sorrowfully.

“It is unmanly, ignoble, mean to urge you, is it not? I have said that to myself over and over again, and Heaven knows I meant to refrain. Heaven knows, that up to this moment, I meant to refrain. But it has been too strong for me. It has carried me away with it. It is cruel to extort a promise from the woman one loves, and hamper her freedom. Heroes in books can be happy in giving up her whom they love to another;

but can men in real life, Rosa ? I think, then, they cannot love as I do. Oh, my darling, my darling ! give me a fragment of hope to take away with me ; only one fragment to sustain me for long weary years.”

She could not speak even yet, but her tears were pouring down like rain, and her head was bent like that of some frail, fair flower, over which the storm wind was raging.

“ Let me earn your love, sweetest ! I do not deserve it yet, I know. The remembrance of the careless indifference with which I treated you, when I was a foolish boy who did not know your worth, is the bitterest drop in my cup of sorrow. Let me work for you, prove myself worthy of you, if that be possible ; serve for you seven years, or twice seven years, if need be, as Jacob served for Rachel.”

Struggling hard to subdue her agitation, she pointed towards the East, and said in a low, broken voice, which grew calmer and more resolute as she proceeded :

“ There is your path before you, Eddy—the plain path of duty ; and mine—mine lies now in a contrary direction. Be brave and patient, even though it must be trodden at first with bleeding feet ; and power to endure and even hope will surely come in time. We

both of us have a cross to bear ; oh, brother, brother, I as well as you."

It was the first word she had uttered to show that the future before her appeared not quite as unclouded and bright as she would have had him believe. Strange to say, instead of depressing him, this avowal seemed to him like a faint hope of dawn.

"For the love of Heaven, Rosa," he exclaimed, "crush my hopes to death at once, or tell me if your last words would indicate that I am not wholly indifferent—that it might—might be possible—"

"There is a spot," she said, with a burning blush, and voice scarcely audible through her tears, "where East and West come together ; perhaps—if God wills it—perhaps we may meet there in the years to come."

Thus they separated, without further word or sign.

He passed away towards the East, cold and grey, and she went back into the house, behind which the sun was setting.

* * * * *

Edwin Drood, on his arrival in London, hastened to his lodgings ; and, weary and sad, yet with a grain of comfort in his heart, too, laid himself to rest ; and slept, as only youth

can sleep, even in the midst of agitation and sorrow.

He rose early the next morning, and as he dressed, he began to reconsider his plans, and to call up before his mind's eye the few things yet to be done, before he set out upon his long journey.

There was a last visit to be paid to Madge—his dear, loving Madge—and he began to reproach himself for having deferred this so long. He had been fit for nothing—so he argued in his own justification—until he had known his fate, and had had that last interview with Rosa. He would make a man of himself for her sake! He would show her that no sacrifice was too great that could win her in the end! That little bit of a promise—if it were a promise—was worth all the world to him.

He felt fresh and bright, and was surprised to hear, all of a sudden, that he was humming an old tune—what a long time it had been since he had done that! And looking in the glass to brush his sunny hair, he hardly knew himself—the smiling hope in his face made it so young again. Those few last words from those beloved lips had been to him as an elixir of life.

He had bought a present for Madge's

mother, to conciliate her—a costly black silk dress; and for Madge, a beautiful little gold watch, with her name and his initials engraved inside.

He tried to fancy how delighted she would be, and how her soft, grey eyes would sparkle at the sight of it. Perhaps she would laugh for pleasure. He was sure her laugh must be sweet and low, the sort of laugh to match her saint-like eyes.

Yet, now he came to think of it, he did not remember ever to have heard her laugh. Dear, loving, patient Madge! His sister, whom he would care for, and never forget, as long as he should live! And what a friend Rosa would be to her! What happiness to be able to think of the two together!

He wound up the pretty toy, set it to the right time—six o'clock—and listened to its ticking. Then, with sudden tenderness, he pressed it to his lips, as if it had been the gentle hand of her for whom it was intended. Dear Madge! He loved it, because she would wear it at her heart; and she would love it, because he had been the giver.

He laid it on his dressing-table, at the foot of the tall wax candle, and hastened to complete his toilet.

He would take it to Madge to-day, and he

would make himself as spruce as possible, because (he knew it well) all brightness in him reflected back on her. He was no beggar now, but a gentleman of property, and of position.

Mrs. Thomson would have no objection to his coming any more. And if the Rev. Jeremiah should be there—that tremendous humbug—he would annihilate him so completely that he would wish he had never been born. That would be the greatest service he could do for Madge.

He laughed heartily, as the red face, long body and short legs of Mrs. Thomson's spiritual guide rose before his mental vision.

What a low tick the little watch had, compared to that of the one he had bought for himself, which ticked loudly, and seemed to try to stifle the quiet voice of the other. Sometimes, with a start, he thought it had really ceased, and stooped, with more alarm than the occasion seemed to warrant, to listen.

No, it was a false alarm, and yet it worried him. What nonsense to begin to compare the two, as if the one represented Madge's life, and the other his own. The little watch, for all its timidity, was much the more costly of the two, and would probably last the

longer. Yes, it would tick for many, many years, and its active little heart palpitate, if it were wound up—but if not?

Pshaw! What foolish fancies, and how wholly without foundation. He could never repay Madge for her love and care, and all attempt at payment would be a mockery. He could only love her in return, and he *did* love her as dearly as if she had been his real sister. She had refused his silly offer, because she was a million times wiser than he, and a million times better. She had foreseen the misery—the exquisite misery—which such an ill-considered marriage would have resulted in. What could be more terrible than having a wife, whom one could only love as a sister?

He went into his sitting-room, close at hand, and rang the bell for his breakfast. It was not yet fully day, but as he pushed aside the blind and peeped through the window, he saw that the roofs were white with snow, which was still falling—the first snow of the unusually mild winter.

Just then, his eye, wandering back to the mantel-piece, saw a letter stuck into the frame of the looking-glass, and the neat maid-servant entering with his coffee—for he was well and punctually served—he inquired, taking it down, whether it had come yesterday or that morning.

"Yesterday, sir: I put it there, where I thought your eye would fall upon it, and forgot further to mention it last evening."

He was reading the address, in a stiff, uneducated hand, new to him. Then he broke open the envelope and looked at the signature. "Jane Thomson." Jane Thomson! Ha! the mother of his Madge.

He read the contents hurriedly, sick with dread of something he could not bear to contemplate. They were as follow—

"HONOURED SIR,

"This is to inform you that Madge is very bad, and wants to see you. If you are not already gone to furrin parts, which you give us notice of intending so to do, will you come immediate, for she is *very* bad.

"Your obedient servant,

"JANE THOMSON."

"P.S.—Madge says I must add that you must not be frightened, nor anyways put yourself out of the way for the likes of us. She knows, she says, that ships don't start for furrin parts every day; but oh, sir, she is very bad.

"JANE THOMSON, the old address."

He read and re-read these lines, as if they had been in a strange language, and he

could make no meaning out of them. He read and re-read them as if they had been a dread echo of foolish words which he himself had uttered.

Then, pushing back his clustering hair, he raised his clasped hands and prayed God to forgive *him* and save *her*. For there was a blot in the middle of the writing, which smote upon his heart more hopelessly than the words themselves. A blot like a fallen tear!

He rang the bell again, ordered the servant, frightened at his wild looks and manner, to fetch a cab immediately. He tried to drink a cup of coffee, but it choked and sickened him; and he was pacing the room in terrible impatience long before the cab arrived. And all the time they were driving through the streets, he could think of nothing but that blot and its dread significance. For, sickness which could force a tear from those hard eyes must be without hope, indeed.

He sprang from the cab, and, going up the steps, rang softly. His summons was immediately answered by a little girl, red-eyed, and exceedingly dirty, whose face presented a comical mixture of real sorrow and unbounded importance in her share of it.

“You’s the young man as was lodging

here six months ago, ain't you?" she said. "I remember yer. What a swell you've growed! I'm took in to help. She," pointing upstairs, "has been an acquaintance o' mine a long time. I was one o' the first to say to the others that it was a sin and a shame to laugh at her, for she couldn't help being crooked, and she didn't make herself."

The child then looked up shrewdly into his face, as if expecting to be complimented on her philanthropy.

"Tell Mrs. Thomson I am here," he said, impatiently.

"You are to go right upstairs, and knock at the door. The missus said so. She's a lying in the room as was yours. When she took to her bed, she wanted to lie there, and as the garret ain't convenient for the doctor, who is short-winded, she had her own way. Bless yer! she has her own way more than you'd think for. The missus is scared and frightened like, and lets her do just what she likes; and she haven't pulled my ears nor boxed 'em for a whole week, the missus haven't, nor called me a little fool neither, nor rapped my head agin the door. I let the meat burn to a coal yesterday, and the kettle bile over, and she never said a word. I expect I shall ketch it all in a heap when it's

over ; but if it comes to the wust, I can cut and run, you see. Lor, what a hurry you are in ! ”

For, in his burning anxiety and impatience to see and hear Madge, in his terrible fear of how he might find her, he had pushed the child aside almost roughly, and was proceeding up the stairs.

Yet, when he reached the door of the room which had been his, he paused, and turned faint with fear, for it was as still inside as if Death had entered it already.

His step, though he had softened it, had been heard in the sick room, and a woman opened the door to him. Was that the woman who had dared to say that she feared if her child should die, she would be barely able to shed a tear for the sake of decency ? All the colour had fled from her high-boned, sallow cheek, her eyes were blood-shot and swollen from much weeping, and the light in them dimmed from hopeless watching. She had ventured to tread under foot, and spurn from her, those natural affections given to every mother by God, and this was her heavy punishment.

This—that they rose up against her, and raised long-silenced voices in terrible condemnation. This—that a placid stream, which

was given to fertilise her life and make it beautiful, hemmed too long and fatally, now burst forth as a roaring cataract, tearing away every prop and stay, and leaving in its track devastation and ruin. This—that the rich blessing of a noble daughter's love, recognised as such too late, had been turned, by her own hardness of heart, into a condemning memory and an awful curse.

Oh, woe, woe ! unto such as raise the hand in defiance against their Maker and their Judge ; who venture to disregard His eternal laws ; who erect for themselves a false idol, and bow down and worship it ; who “ pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and omit the weightier matters of the law.” Woe, unutterable woe ! when His long-suffering patience has come to an end ; when He raises His hand to punish ; and the rod of His wrath—the rod of scorpions—falls upon their quivering flesh ; for there is then none to hear or heed them when they cry.

The woman, unable to speak, pointed to the bed whereon her daughter lay. He could not look at her yet ; his heart beat to suffocation, and he glanced round the room to compose himself first. How familiar it all was ! The pattern of the paper on the wall ; the stain by the window where the wet had come

through ; the neatly-darned window curtain ; the roofs opposite, white with snow now as then ; the tiny dressing-table, and little looking glass, just large enough to see one's face in and no more ; the table by the bedside, and row of little bottles, labelled, upon it ; the old four-post bedstead, with the faded grey curtains ; the snowy counterpane ; nothing was wanting except the flowers and the patient figure by the bedside—for she—. Then his eyes, wandering up to this point, went a step further, and rested on her face.

At the sight of it—at the certainty which it gave, of the hopelessness of all hope—his fluttering heart seemed to sink beneath the weight which fell upon it, and he gasped for breath, in deadly fear that he was going to faint ; but he dared not do that on her account, and when he had successfully conquered the inclination, he looked at her once more.

There was nothing painful in the sight of that peaceful face, wasted away to a mere nothing. Her eyes were closed, and she seemed to slumber, as if already lost to sense of outward sight and sound. But while he feared she was too far gone to recognise him, she opened her eyes, and smiled a welcome. Alas ! those grey eyes lit with unearthly

lustre, that sweet, patient smile, were the only signs remaining of the Madge whom he had left !

“In the snow, Robert,” she said, feebly, but to his unspeakable relief, evidently fully conscious, “you came to me the first time in the snow, and now also for the last.”

He burst into tears, and flung himself by the bedside ; his heart swelled to bursting, and he could not repress them. She put out her poor, thin hand, and stroked his clustering hair, as she had been wont to do in the old time, when his troubles became too strong for his endurance.

“I have been longing to see you, Robert, once more ; and all last night I lay awake thinking of you. I was afraid sometimes that you would not be able to come, and my faith was weak ; but this morning, when mother told me that snow was falling, it seemed like a promise ; and when it was light enough for me to see the flakes, I fancied each whispered softly as it fell, ‘Be of good cheer, Madge, for he is coming.’”

“Oh, Madge, dear Madge, I deserve that you should doubt me, but I am not so ungrateful and wicked as that. I meant to come. I should have come ; indeed, indeed I should.”

“Thank you, Robert. Thank God for having sent you to me ; that first time and this last ! And you are righted now, and have friends who love and care for you. How happy that makes me ! I think I could not have died in peace without knowing that. I should have been uneasy, even in heaven, if you were unhappy on earth. I should have found no peace, from longing to come and comfort you.”

“Oh, Madge, sister, if we only could have kept you here ! ”

“It is better so, Robert ; far, far better so. I was a poor, sickly thing always. Robert,” she whispered, after a pause, while on her sunken cheek a hectic flush rose, “you have found your lost treasure, have you not ? ”

“I hope so, Madge. I have told her all about you ; and she was going to come and see you, and love you, and care for you, when I am gone. Oh, it is hard to have to bear this, after all that I have borne already.”

“It is better so,” said the dying girl, once more.

Then she closed her eyes again, exhausted, but, opening them after a few minutes, said—

“I’ve no time to waste in sleep before I go. Give me a drop of cordial, mother dear ;

something to give me strength for awhile. Oh, Robert, you'll be kind to mother when she's left alone, won't you? She's been such a good nurse, and never leaves me now. It's worth being ill, to find out what a heart mother has."

"Don't 'ee say that, Madge. I've been the death of you, and I wish you'd hate me, and tell me so, instead of being the angel you always were. It's that hurts me now more than anything. If it wasn't for knowing where I should go to, I'd wish I could die along with you," and the woman's sobs rent her strong frame, while burning drops of remorse and shame fell from her aching eyes.

"Mother, dear, sit down beside me, and hear what I've got to beg of you. Don't die for my sake, but live for me, and try to go on with a work which I have begun, but which has fallen from my helpless hands."

"I'd cut off my right hand, and glad to do it, if it would save you, Madge."

"Then listen, mother. Ever since I was little, I have felt a wish to do something for the poor neglected children, of whom there are so many in this great city, and some, even in our quiet neighbourhood. I have tried, in my poor, dull way, to comfort and help them, and show them what is right

and good. There are children who know nothing of a parent's love, and to whom the mother even, is only a scolding vixen, who has a right to treat them to a blow when and how she will, and who makes full use of her power; there are children whose only notion of a father is that of a drunken brute, of whom they are in terror of their lives; there are children reared in sin and shame, orphans at their birth, and old in practice of evil before they know what evil means. I have met with such children, mother, and have found that even a kind word is a novelty to them; and there are many, many. Now, mother, you are so much cleverer than I; how easy it is to you to learn anything, and how beautifully you sew, and how natural things come to you; if you will try to teach these little ones, and help them on their thorny way, you are sure to succeed. If you should come across any such a one in your daily work, think it is little Madge, mother, and be kind to it for my sake."

The woman promised passionately that she would do that, and any, any, anything else that her daughter wished; and administered, at her request, another draught of the cordial, for her strength was nearly gone, and she could only feebly beg that her brother would read to her.

“What shall I read, Madge?”

She pointed to a Church Service, lying on the little table, and said: “Out of that—the Litany.”

His voice trembled as he uttered the first words of that magnificent appeal to God, beginning at the spot where his eye first rested:

“By the Mystery of Thy holy Incarnation, by Thy holy Nativity and Circumcision, by Thy Baptism, Fasting and Temptation”—

They both started at the clearness of the response from the dying girl: “Good Lord, deliver us!”

“By Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy Cross and Passion, by Thy precious Death and Burial—”

His voice died away in awe-struck silence, for, entering with the bright sunbeam which broke through the clouds and lit up the face upon the bed with glory, came a solemn messenger.

Oh, Angel of Death! dreaded so terribly by most, yet gifted with absolute power to still pain, and say to sharpest suffering: “Peace, be still;” oh, last physician! those who have learned to love thy Master, need never fear thee, whom He has sent in tenderest love to bring them to Himself!

Opening her eyes hurriedly, the girl, as if fully conscious that the summons had come, said :

“Farewell, mother dear, God bless and comfort you! Farewell, Robert, we shall meet again in a land where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.”

With this unconscious confession of her innocent secret upon her paling lips, she sank into repose again. The watchers, whose grief was hushed in awe, thought she was gone, when once more the light of her earnest eyes, not yet quite extinguished, flashed upon them.

“Kiss me, Robert!”

As he bowed his head to meet hers, so with a last dying effort, she raised hers to his, and, for the first and only time, their lips met. Then her head fell back heavily, and in the golden glory of the morning, her pure spirit, casting off the dross of these earthly garments, put on for ever the beauty of the angels.

CHAPTER XI.

“HAPPY IS THE BRIDE WHOM THE SUN SHINES
ON.”

It was—in accordance with their earnest wish, notwithstanding the sympathetic joy in it of all Cloisterham—a very quiet wedding, that of the Rev. Septimus and Helena, celebrated about nine months after Neville's death; and yet the springs of peace and happiness in the hearts of both were so deep and clear, that mirth and gaiety, even if they had proved powerless to disturb those living waters, would certainly have been incongruous, and rather diminished than heightened their pure enjoyment and perfect bliss.

The day was as sweet and full of promise as the fair face of the bride, softened into wondrous beauty by the refining power of love and sorrow—sorrow without a particle of bitterness, and becoming almost, in course of time, a holy joy and blessed memory. For the thought of the dead brother, waiting for her in heaven, was a powerful magnet to draw her soul upward to the Author of all Good and Happiness, with whom she knew him safe from sin and trouble evermore.

Thus, though a few natural tears fell as she remembered the last autumn, when he had been her constant companion, and they had trode their thorny path together, hand in hand, they were gentle tears of resignation for herself and thankfulness for him. And as she laid aside, for the first time since he had left her, the black dress worn in his memory, to assume the spotless white attire of the bride, she did so with less grief than she had anticipated, for she fancied him looking down upon her, not distressed at this putting away of what was sacred to him, but with a smile of unutterable love in his earnest eyes, and a blessing on his lips.

Rosa was to be the only bridesmaid, and at this moment hastened in to perform her glad duty, and help her dearly-loved friend to dress for this most important occasion of her life.

She insisted on arranging the massive braids of dusky hair, and did so with the nattiness and neat handedness natural to her, admiring its rare length and silky softness, and sometimes stopping to compare a tress of it with her own bright brown curls, just long enough now "to prevent me looking exactly like an effeminate boy; creatures for whom I cherish an inveterate dislike, my

dear, and hate to resemble," and growing famously. "In about another ten years," said Rosa, laughing, pulling them to make them longer, "they may have reached their old length again perhaps, if all goes well with me."

"It is such a pity they had to be cut off," said Helena, sympathisingly.

"Oh, don't think I mind," answered Rosa, shaking them; "or rather, do think I mind, and always shall, for if I had not had to lose them, I should never have found out something infinitely more precious—the loving fullness of your noble heart, my Helena." And Rosa's pretty, busy fingers stood still a moment, while she pressed her soft lips upon the braids of hair, which she had gracefully twined round the beautifully formed head of the bride.

"There! now you look like a queen, my darling," said Rosa, delighted, when the toilette was completed, and the bride stood before her in snowy garments, with the fragrant orange blossom in her dusky hair. "And here is the new mamma come to admire you."

Old Mrs. Chrisparkle had opened the door and was looking in upon them, with tears in her eyes, but gladness in her heart.

And a rare pair they were to look at! Rosa, with her rounded little figure, soft plumpness, rosy purity of complexion, sunny brown hair and dark eyes—now dancing with mirth, and, anon, beaming with tenderness; and Helena, straight and slender, stately and grand, yet with an almost childlike longing for support and sympathy in her brilliant eyes, as she turned them towards her—the mother of him, whom this day would make her husband.

“My daughter! My beautiful daughter!” It was all the china shepherdess could utter, as she clasped the girl to her warm, motherly heart, embracing her with almost passionate tenderness.

And Helena’s voice, clear and melodious ever, now thrilled upon the old lady’s ear with exquisite pathos: “Mother! His mother, and mine! Try to love me a little, for his dear sake!”

The Dean, assisted by one of Mr. Chrisparkle’s ministering brethren, performed the ceremony. His Reverence had openly expressed a wish to do so, to his subordinate in the Close; with Mr. Tope, decently in the background, but well within earshot, to bear witness thereof, and report the same to Cloisterham.

“I—I should really feel a satisfaction,” said the Dean, pausing to blow his nose and give Mr. Chrisparkle an opportunity to nerve himself for the communication, “in—in officiating. Under the circumstance, I—I am desirous to—to publicly express my sanction, and—and full approbation of your choice. And a—a lovelier bride,” continued the Dean, warming, “never approached the altar. Good—a—*good* morning.”

Then the Dean—after first bestowing an approving glance on Mr. Tope, who had been observed to rub his coat-sleeve across his eyes, and heard to sniff loudly, during the interview, and who was now gazing up to heaven, as if only that attitude could in any way express his emotion—benevolently turned his back upon the two, and trotted away to his Deanery.

“Very kind ! very handsome of the Dean !” said Mr. Chrisparkle, musingly.

Upon which, Mr. Tope, approaching a step nearer, and subsiding from the high respect due to a Dean, into the middle-height respect due to a Minor Canon, remarked, prefacing his words with another sniff : “that he always had knowed that his Reverence was a hangel upon hearth, but now he should look out to see his wings a sprouting.”

Though whether he expected they would be bestowed in order to enable his Reverence to soar with ease and swiftness into his native sphere, leaving Cloisterham to mourn his loss, or for any other reason, he did not specify.

Good Mrs. Dean, in the fullness of her bountiful good-nature, would have liked nothing better than to give the breakfast, and—positively venturing upon a sort of initiative—propounded the question to “John,” to learn his views upon the subject. But this idea was vehemently scouted by Miss Dean, who wondered if mamma would ever learn to act up to her position; and even the Dean, after much ponderous shaking of the head, and deep reflection, came to this final conclusion, showing infinite wisdom and depth of discernment, that, “limits were limits, and bounds were bounds,” and that “we must draw the line somewhere, Darling.”

Upon hearing which irrevocable decree, Mrs. Dean withdrew her resolution somewhat hurriedly, and the project was abandoned.

But Mrs. Dean was not to be let off so easily. Her husband’s reproof, as he stooped to kiss her before retiring to his study, where, surrounded by books, ink, paper, and every other appliance for hard exercise of the mind,

he was accustomed to nod through the peaceful morning hours in his easy chair, undisturbed and undisturbing, was mild and gentle like himself.

“It is well for society,” he said, smiling affably as he pinched her plump, rosy cheek, “that we men, the natural rulers of the world, have heads—heads,” repeated the Dean. “It is also well that woman, that weaker but most charming vessel, has a—a heart, heart! Let that heart, impulsive, loving, sympathising, if not always wise, ever be the ruling motive of the—the delightful sex! Let it indulge in its poetic dreamings; let it strew our path with flowers, so long as we are there, to—to hem, if necessary, and to—to curb! Cheer up, Darling; I—I am not angry with you, not in the least.”

Oh, if only Miss Dean had been as merciful! But, as her father retired, she came to the fore, and the good humour and patience of her victim rendered her still more severe and bitter. She had no patience with mamma! She believed mamma would as soon as not—sooner than not—lie down in the dirt to be trampled on! She felt certain that mamma would rejoice in doing it, in order to bring ignominy on the family! She wished she were mamma’s husband, if only to show how

she would lay down the law! Papa was all very well, but papa had no force of character! Papa petted mamma's faults, until she believed them to be virtues. Of all things in the world, exclaimed Miss Dean, with rising indignation, she hated namby-pamby! Let people say openly that they despised their own daughters, that they looked down upon their own daughters, and that they rejoiced when other people did the same, but for heaven's sake, let them avoid namby-pamby!

"La, Jane, my dear, I am afraid you are not well this morning," said the kind-hearted lady, a little disconcerted.

Good gracious! Why did not mamma bid her hold her tongue, and go to bed directly? (it was really a wonder that she didn't!) Why did not mamma treat her entirely as a child, instead of only half? Was she not a woman? (no doubt about it) and had she not a common claim to consideration and respect? But oh, she forgot that she was only mamma's daughter, and not the daughter of other people! Other people's daughters had a claim on mamma, which she had not. They were handsome, and charming, and pretty, and dear, and were kissed and caressed, and worthy of husbands—while she—

It was quite a relief to see Miss Dean's

face disappear behind a handkerchief at this point, for her manner was far from pleasant, and her words were far from agreeable.

For her part, she continued, re-appearing, she should make it a point of principle not to be present at the wedding. She could not agree with papa and mamma that the match was an appropriate one. Far be it from her to presume to dictate to papa, or try to persuade him to recall his rash promise of officiating, but she supposed he would not insist on her being present; if he did, of course she would have no choice but to obey, though under protest.

Mrs. Dean thought her papa would let her do as she pleased about that.

She never could forget—and it was this, and this alone, which made her abhor the idea—that the Revd. Septimus, though only a Minor Canon, was a clergyman of the Church of England, and the bride the sister of a young man who had been closely connected (no one could deny that!) with a murder.

“Now, Jane, that is cruel and unfair! You make me ashamed of you, you really do.”

She had known it! She had felt quite certain beforehand that mamma would say she was ashamed of her. Not that there was

any need to say it! All the world knew it! Whether she drove out with mamma, or walked with mamma, she could read distinctly in the faces of those meeting them: "That is Miss Dean, whose mother is ashamed of her!"

"I can't stand this much longer," said the elder lady, growing as angry as she, good, kindly soul! could grow. "You are old enough to know better, Jane."

Old enough to know better! Very well! Let her mother heap up the insults on her daughter's helpless head; secure in her position as mother, against retort. She had expressed her opinion, and she would abide by it, although she must suffer martyrdom in so doing. She would not speak of the so-called beauty of the bride—beauty as fleeting as it was over-rated. Of the two, give her little Miss Bud, who would be passable, if she were not so ruined by conceit. Those dark girls, early ripe, faded as rapidly. In another year Helena's bloom would be dimmed, her complexion sallow, her cheeks sunken, and her nose and chin evince an unbecoming desire to become more intimately acquainted.

"Mark my words," said Miss Dean, suddenly imbued with a spirit of prophecy, "in another year or two that girl will be a

dragged creature, worn out and old, with no end of sickly children crying at her heels, and then what will Mr. Chrisparkle say?"

Mrs. Dean, not pretending to guess what he might say, Miss Dean proceeded—

"He will say to himself: 'Why did I not look before I leaped? Were not other chances open to me, perhaps? Have I not stood fatally in my own way, and neglected my opportunities? Was there—?'"

Here Miss Dean, looking round to see what effect her words were producing, saw, to her amaze, that her mother had quietly left the room, and that she was holding forth to the circumambient air, alone.

Mr. Grewgious—beforehand, repeatedly and carefully drilled by Rosa—gave away the bride. It would be practice, he said, for the time when he should be called upon to give away his own little daughter; for now there was no idea in his mind of shifting this labour of love on to a substitute. There had been some consultation as to the propriety of applying to Mr. Honeythunder; but Mr. Chrisparkle, remembering his last visit to the Haven of Philanthropy, and his philanthropic reception there, hesitated to repeat the experiment. Besides which they all entertained strong fears that the former guardian of the

orphan twins would consider it a part of his mission, and his bounden duty, to endeavour to blast their happiness. Therefore, they finally resolved to spare this worthy philanthropist the necessity of philanthropically lacerating their feelings, and perhaps, his own, by only informing him of the event when interference would be too late, and remonstrances in vain.

“Happy is the bride whom the sun shines on!” These words, with the force of a prophecy, certain to be fulfilled, rose to Rosa’s remembrance, as the warm, bright sunbeams crept through the waving trees to nestle lovingly on Helena’s graceful head and figure, as she passed under them, into the sweet, calm shade of the Cathedral. They danced about her as if they loved to caress her, and when she went in beyond them, they flew back to Neville’s grave, and kissed the flowers growing there, and whispered to him of the goodness and the beauty of his sister, and of the noble true-heartedness of the man who would more than fill up his lost place, and make her happy, as she deserved. And while the sunbeams danced and whispered, while the trees rustled their knowledge of the bright event, while the birds sang in its honour their songs of love, the solemn marri-

age service went on, and came to its end, and Septimus and Helena were no more two, but one flesh.

“Happy is the bride whom the sun shines on!” Aye, and a thousand times more happy she who can grasp such a true, strong, loving hand; can rest on such a noble heart; can know in very truth that the vow to “love and cherish” her till death doth part them, is no mere form of words, but a solemn promise, which will be kept as solemnly!

So Septimus Chrisparkle and Helena, his wife, passed out again into the sunshine, and the birds sang to welcome them, and the trees rustled joyfully over their heads, and the sunbeams whispered promises of bright, bright days in store, and all Nature rejoiced with them.

Mr. Grewgious received, as he deserved, the heartiest and merriest congratulations, as to the manner in which he had given away the bride, and public opinion was almost unanimous that he had surpassed even himself on this occasion. Only Mr. Tope, anxiously examining his favourite corns in the rear, upon which the Collector of Rents had trodden more than once, with crushing power, was heard to mutter a contrary opinion, and Rosa’s dress was torn from the waist in a

most unexpected manner. However, she being a natty little creature, who knew how to promptly tuck it up, and make the best of it, no one took the trouble to instigate any inquiry as to the perpetrator, which probably would have led direct back to Mr. Grewgious.

Moreover, Miss Twinkleton (who, in a highly sentimental state of mind, and a side pew, attended by a chosen few of the young ladies, and Mrs Tisher rustling in her best remnant of "better days" and weaker backed than ever, had been present at the ceremony, notwithstanding her maidenly blushes, and maidenly reflection as to who would be the next victim on the hymeneal altar?—did echo answer, thou?) was said to have been the originator of the report, that when the Dean turned towards Rosa's ill-starred guardian with the question, "Who giveth this woman—?" he had replied at first, in great confusion and alarm, while smoothing his head, that he "didn't know." But Miss Twinkleton had never quite forgiven Mr. Grewgious his share in the fabrication, or distillation of those tears of hers, which had fallen into the English Channel, and could hardly be looked upon in the light of an impartial witness.

Nothing had been able to induce the china shepherdess to desist from preparing quite a grand breakfast, although, as they had told her laughingly, there was nobody to partake. She had but one son, she said, and this last labour of love she *would* perform. And if there were no visitors to do honour to her housekeeping, there were plenty of poor people, among whom the viands might be distributed after they had graced her board. So they were obliged to let this wilful little woman have her way : indeed it was the best they could do, to put a good face upon the matter, for the china shepherdess had “made up her mind” and her son, pretending to be much alarmed, declared he knew from sad experience what that signified.

And truly it was a healing sight for sore eyes, and a glorious sight for dainty palates, that spread board in Minor Canon Corner ! But the sweetest sight of all in the eyes of the house’s master, was to see his wife fast locked in those dear motherly arms, and to know that the happy china shepherdess had forgotten all her triumphs of culinary skill in rejoicing over her children.

There were pheasants and partridges, buried in transparent jelly, which seemed to challenge the company to decide between

their respective merits—yet placidly, as if each felt certain beforehand, that it was sure to win. Close at hand, garnished hams and tongues revealed their rosy state of perfection, and made the water run into a hungry mouth. A prodigious game pie stood prominent, as if anxious to attract attention. A gigantic round of corned beef appeared to cry loudly, “I wasn’t put here to be only looked at.” Creams, jellies, tarts, and fruit winked knowingly at the ladies, and “made eyes,” at them shamelessly. A perfect mountain of a bride-cake, snowy-white and wreathed in orange-blossom, awaited with resignation its dissection by the fair hand of the bride, and, sweeter in death than in life, even seemed to glory in its immolation on such an altar. Wines, full of “sunny memories of foreign lands” freely offered up their life-blood for love of the bride. Champagne corks were discharged in honour of the occasion: and, in short, notwithstanding the small number of the guests, Mrs. Chrisparkle made as great a show as if all Cloisterham had been invited. Mr. and Mrs. Tope, in their glory (the former, fighting shy of Mr. Grewgious) not only did the waiting, but the greater part of the eating and drinking, after all, and when the former, forgetting his tingling toes, got upon unsteady feet, to

propose with an uncertain voice—uncertain, not from want of good-will, but from old Madeira—health and unbounded prosperity to the bridegroom and the bride, he still remained standing, after this toast had been drunk with tremendous applause, to give them another.

“Friends and fellow townsmen,” said Mr. Tope, “not forgetting the ladies, which who would forget them or could? I axes you to jine me in another toast, and to drink it, also, in a bumper. I give you a party which well knows what is what, and acts accordin’. To make it short, which it never was my custom to make it long, I give you, fellow-townsmen and townswimmin, ‘Old Mrs. Chrisparkle!’”

It was delightful to see how cook, redder-faced than usual from emotion, forgot all her little squabbles with the “missus” to do honour to this toast. It was worth going “below stairs” to see Mary’s pretty, blushing face when Bill Bumpkins, from the Deanery, nudged her elbow and whispered something in her ear. It was affecting to hear how Mr. and Mrs. Tope recalled reminiscences of their courtship, and referred to the untroubled happiness of their married life, which ought to be an incentive to others to lose no time in following suit, and doing as they had done.

In the course of conversation, which

became after this more general, Mrs. Tope spoke of "them bygone times, which hadn't ought to be mentioned on such a festive occasion, but which never could be forgot." She alluded, in terms of strong disapprobation, to the snowy-haired buffer who, to the discredit of human natur, had turned out, notwithstanding his patriarchal appearance, to be a detective and a spe—y. Why, she exclaimed, he might have murdered them all in their beds, and they never knowed it. The contemplation of this possibility, even after so long a time, was fatal to her peace of mind. But she rejected Bill Bumpkins' attempt at consolation with disdain, because it consisted in an attempt to prove that the man had come to detect murder, and not commit it, hadn't he? and was very warm indeed afterwards, when alone with her husband, on the subject of that misguided young man's weakness of mind, and dullness of comprehension, exclaiming with extreme bitterness, that of all wooden-headed young men, which ever she did see, that young man were the wooden-headedest.

And the bridegroom and the bride? Who may describe Helena's feelings, when she found herself for the first time alone with her husband, in the carriage conveying them to the station? Who may picture the thankful

joy of the lonely orphan girl, whose only friend in adversity had been taken from her by death, and to whom God had given back tenfold what she had lost, given her a mother, home, and husband? Who may attempt to disclose her sensations, when he clasped her to his heart with the exclamation, so full of rapture when uttered by love to love—my wife!

Clasp her again and again to thy honest heart, Septimus! Let her feel its true steady beat; quickened now with tenderest, never-dying love! Let her rest her head upon thy broad breast, where, until “death doth you part,” must be her unfailing solace from sorrow and from care! Press thy lips once more and yet again on her dark head, every hair of which is sacred to thee. Tremble almost at thy happiness, tinged with solemn awe; for it is God who has given her to thee, and thou must render an account to Him, how thou hast kept thy vow to “love and cherish!” My wife! My husband! What words can be more terrible than these when they suggest a sense of galling bondage, and of fetters which only death, or disgrace worse than death, can sever? What words can express a tenderness as profound, an affection as sublime, when love utters them to love?

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE EAST AND WEST COME TOGETHER.

MORE than five years have come and gone since the Revd. Septimus and Helena plighted their troth together in the old Cathedral. Five springs, summers, autumns, winters,—and spring again. May has come into the land—not pouting, wilful, changeable, boisterous, like so many of her predecessors and namesakes, who seemed to have occupied their precious time in a constant effort to emulate the wild gambols of their elder brother, March, and were regular tomboys, wholly undeserving of their fame—but soft, sweet, smiling through gentle tears; clothed in bridal garments and lovely as a bride. The gardens in Cloisterham are fragrant with the breath of the lilac and jessamine, beautiful with the blossoms of the pear-tree and the apple, and a very glory to behold. The birds, intoxicated with love, sing impassioned songs to their brooding mates, and, animated by a spirit of gentle rivalry, seem each to strive to excel the others.

But no song of the birds, nor scent of the flowers, appears half so new and wonderful

to the Minor Canon—though he sees it daily—as the lovely face of his wife, happy and smiling with pleasure, as she watches the gambols of her children. For two pair of little feet patter incessantly in the old house and in the old garden in Minor Canon Corner, and two rosy mouths chatter there the live-long day. The tears rise to his eyes as he looks at her and them, and wonders, as he has wondered many thousand times before, if ever man alive was half so happy and blessed as he. Every day since he and she became one, he has learned—he thinks so—learned to love her better, honour her more, reverence her more completely as his better angel. And when the prattle of the children is hushed in sleep, and he stands beside their cots, with his wife's dear hand, clasped—ah, so tenderly!—in his, their soft breathing seems to him to sanctify the old, loved home, and make it more like heaven.

Grandmamma is a stationary guest in Minor Canon Corner, and (in confidence) she probably always will remain so. Yet there are times and seasons (particularly at such periods, when the more judicious love of the parents, interposes a slight impediment to the unlimited spoiling of the laddies) when she declares it her irrevocable resolution to retire

into some cottage in the neighbourhood and bury her diminished head there. She sometimes even goes so far as to insist on her Sept (the big one) taking immediate steps to bring about this catastrophe; for of course now that little Neville and little Sept have grown into such sturdy urchins, there oughtn't to be—and isn't—room for her any more. But this is a joke; she would pine to death without her darlings; and as for the children—why, the merest hint of a possibility that grandma ever could, or would, go away, is sure to elicit such heartrending and despairing howls, that she has more than enough to do to pacify them, forgetting, in so doing, her baleful intentions. Indeed, this threat, like the old imaginary rod, the only one in Minor Canon Corner, is, when judiciously made use of, never known to fail, as a corrective for the children. If first-born Neville (a child of earnest nature and strong passions) falls into a fit of childish rage, which sometimes still occurs, though the holy restraint of love is working wonderfully, the warning, that dear grandma's head cannot stand that, will check him instantly. If baby Sept, a born scapegrace, wanders beyond bounds, heedless of mamma's gentle command, the mere question—what would

grandmamma say? brings a flood of penitent tears, and an eager assurance of "never doing it again." The Revd. Septimus says on such occasions, or when reference is made to the cottage, that he can't afford, any way, to part with grandmamma, for she is worth her weight in gold, in bringing up the children. And Helena says nothing, only lays her soft arm round the old lady's neck, and rests her dark head upon her shoulder; and it is noticeable that this silent appeal is more effective in silencing the china shepherdess, than any reasoning on the part of her son.

For the rest, she is the old china shepherdess still, as bright and brisk as ever, to the full as dainty in attire, and as decided in word and deed, as when she wielded the household sceptre. Yet nothing annoys her more than when her son says (in fun, of course, for, in this respect, and indeed in all others, she is a perfect pattern mother-in-law) that she wields it still. Then, the cottage, mostly barely visible in the misty distance, looms imminent; and Helena is forced to come to the rescue, take the china shepherdess under her wing, bear down heavily upon her husband, and force him to beat an ignominious and shameful retreat.

On one other point, the Minor Canon and his mother contest, with such eagerness, that the childish quarrels of the baby boys sink into insignificance by comparison. He declares she has left off growing old, and made over this unwished-for accomplishment to her children. He says, when he and Helena are grey and tottering, he is convinced she will be a sprightly lassie still. He inquires, whether she does not look upon it as the duty of a mother, to keep, for the sake of decency, a year or two in advance of her son. He relates problematical anecdotes of mystical individuals who have inquired which of the two ladies living with him is his wife? He describes their incredulous surprise when he tells them (blushing under the necessity) that the one who puts his wife quite into shadow, and treats time with such unheard-of scorn, who is small and round of figure, rosy in complexion, fair haired, and without a sign of age—is his mother. He requests his sons (listening to the controversy wide-eyed and open-mouthed) to inform the company whether it is not the truth, that the youthful individual, calling herself grandma, and looking like her own grand-daughter, was discovered, yesterday, on all fours, in the dining-room, with little Sept upon her back;

and the day before found sobbing in the corner, whither she had been condemned by Master Neville, in the character of a ferocious school-master, armed with a cane twice as big as himself?

Upon which, the china shepherdess, with a reddening cheek and an indignant cap, begs to be informed, if he cherishes the conventional respect for her grey hairs—*the grey hairs of his aged mother* (“oho!” from the opposition, and “where are they?” rapturously echoed by Master Neville and Master Sept, who think this capital sport, and a far nicer game than either “horses,” or “school,”) or, if he does not? She is inclined to the latter opinion; she is strongly inclined to the latter opinion. (“Hear, hear!” from the opposition. “Hear, hear, hear!” from Master Neville and Master Sept; who, rushing, after their shout, to smother grandma with kisses—as a punishment, of course, for daring to contest with that miracle of learning and rhetoric, their papa—look so roguish and so rosy, that the old lady feels compelled to stop her flow of words for a moment, to hug them heartily in return, and scold them as traitors to her cause.) Let him look at his blooming wife, and blush to speak of “getting old,” and her, in a breath! Let him contemplate his

own sturdy frame, and ask himself if he can find any similitude between it and age! It is he, who has been growing younger ever since his marriage, and, as a proof of it, has he not left off, since that event, his once so necessary spectacles! And so on, combatting with him, as for dear life, yet delighted to get the worst of it, as she always does, and to be borne away captive to the nursery or garden, by the triumphant children, and there transformed, by their magic wands, into a lion or a bear, or into food for lions and bears, and devoured (by kisses) on the spot.

But the one trump, which the old lady plays out, and always with triumph, is the allusion to his wife. The sombre predictions of Miss Dean are as far as ever from being verified. Helena has grown a trifle plumper, it is true, and the glory and bliss of motherhood have brought a sweet seriousness, wholly different to the proud and haughty reserve of her girlhood, and an addition to the glad submission of the bride. But she is as beautiful as ever; perhaps—of a surety her husband thinks so—*more* beautiful. Her cheek has lost nothing of its perfect contour, her rich colouring is as bright as it was in the old times, and in her radiant eyes, softened into inexpressible tenderness when they rest

upon her husband, and her children, shines a light more pure and holy than ever flashed from the dark orbs of Helena Landless. Look at her now ! sitting in the old garden, under the gnarled apple tree--planted, maybe, by monks--upon whose branches, boys, long ago, tore their trousers, in the same way as heedless little Sept tries to tear his now. See, how the soft pink and white petals fall upon her dusky hair, as if they loved to nestle there ! She is telling her children a story, and the birds are singing the refrain. Baby Sept is on her knee, and little Neville stands beside her, with his dark eyes, so like those of his dead uncle, that she could almost fancy his spirit were looking at her, out of the child, fixed upon her face. Any man might have stopped to gaze back at the group, and feast his eyes upon the lovely face of the young mother, so sweet and calm, and the earnest, listening ones of the children, but no one could have done it with more reverential love and tenderness than does the husband and father. Farewell, Septimus and Helena ! Farewell, china shepherdess ! God bless and prosper you ! Troubles may—must come, but the strong love uniting you, will guide you safely through them all.

Miss Dean has found no appreciative mem-

ber of the opposite sex, and is still mateless. From pitying the male portion of humanity for their unaccountable blindness in choosing weak and frail individuals, whose only merit is a rapidly-fading beauty, in preference to her strong-minded self, she has passed into the stage of hating and despising them. Mr. Chriskle, of whom she invariably speaks as "that poor deluded creature," is an abomination unto her.

Good-natured Mrs. Dean has a hard time of it with her daughter, and indulges occasionally in the futile wish that Jane were not quite so strong-minded.

As for his Reverence the Dean, he is, to use his own words, "getting older, getting older." So much so, that popular rumour has already provided him with a successor. Hold thy head high, ambitious china shepherdess! A dean is next door to a bishop, and thy air castles may develop into more substantial edifices some day, after all.

Mr. Sapsea is no longer Mayor of Cloisterham. His renown had never recovered the shock it had sustained, and his after-dinner fears had proved but too fatally prophetic. He was not re-elected.

The Nuns' House is also presided over by another than Miss Twinkleton, and in the corridors thereof rustle never more weak-backed

Mrs. Tisher's silken skirts. The latter lady is reported to have come out, in elegant style, as lady hairdresser in London, and to have retitulated herself Madame Tishée ; the former has, in point of law, ceased to exist, for she has become Mrs. Sapsea.

She and her conjugal partner occupy the house adorned by the effigy, and partake together of beef, backgammon and salad in the evening ; that is to say, when the lady chooses to do so. There is only one master in the ancestral home of the auctioneer, and that is not Mr. Sapsea. And though a vast deal of looking up takes place there daily, the devout worshipper is not Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton. On the contrary, malignant tongues assert that she takes little trouble to disguise the fact that she looks *down* upon him. But she allows no one to imitate her example, and though the discipline with which she rules him is unbending and inexorable, she cares for his bodily wants, takes him out to walk with her, pours him out his allowance of wine, mixes his grog with judicious hand (not too strong), and performs her duty towards him—though rather as a stern mother than a wife. He is not unhappy on the whole, and has become, in a wonderfully short space of time, the meekest of the meek.

Only one thing seriously troubles him, to

wit, that his wife has put her veto on his dressing like the Dean. She is not going to let him make a fool of himself, she tells him, emphatically ; and when Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton, speaks emphatically, no “young lady” in the Nuns’ House was ever more easily quelled than he is now. He knows, by experience, how sharp and cutting are the twigs of that rod in pickle, and how dexterously and mercilessly Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton, knows how to wield it. Yet, in spite of this, or, perhaps, in consequence of this, he considers, and looks up to, his wife as a most remarkable woman ; and so she is.

Mr. Tartar has not forgotten Rosa. The memory of her beauty, and the love he bore her, can never be eradicated from his mind, and he cannot hear her name, or think of her without emotion, even yet. But he does not make her a topic of conversation with the charming little lady whom the world calls “Mrs. Tartar,” and he calls “my wife.” Upon this subject his mouth is closed, and it is just possible that the theme might fail to interest Mrs. Tartar, or interest her far too much. He prefers not to risk it, therefore. But his little daughter, who came into the world with the snowdrops, and now, in this bright May-time, is just three months old,

bears the name of Rosa, added to that of her mother, because he thinks it the second prettiest name in the world ; and little, happy Mrs. Tartar imagines how, once, he thought it far the prettiest. The old rapturous dream, the awakening from which caused him such bitter agony, has faded into a sweet and tender memory. Time has healed his wounds, as it heals the wounds of all.

Lobley's sole occupation and daily delight is to carry little Miss Tartar about in his brawny arms, sing her old wild sea songs, spin for her endless yarns (not one word of which she can understand) and pour out praises of the "Capting" into her unheeding ears. She exhibits at present (though Lobley prophecies no end of accomplishments for the future) only two faculties with any degree of distinctness, viz., a remarkable aptitude for imbibing her natural nourishment, and a still more remarkable aptitude for rending the air with her cries.

Lobley considers these two performances as something almost supernatural, and signs of an unheard-of intelligence.

"Listen," he exclaims, delighted, holding up his hand to still all other sound which might impede his enjoyment, "that 'ere blessed leetle chicking is a piping again ! Ain't it wonderful ?"

And grog is forgotten, and baccy loses its attraction.

Madge's mother has become a city missionary. Rosa had sought out the bowed-down mother, and they work together. The woman who found it impossible to love her own daughter, has become a mother to hundreds of neglected children, who first have learned from her the meaning of the words love and kindness.

Her strong resolute nature, once turned towards God, instead of from Him, keeps her in the path she has chosen, though many a time a thorny one, unwearied and unfaltering. Her only rest is an occasional one by Madge's grave, her only weakness, a tear shed upon the flowers growing there, her only longing, for renewed strength to distribute her daughter's legacy, whose last words: "Think it is little Madge, mother, and be kind to it for my sake," have become the ruling motive of her life.

Pretty Rosa's plan of living with her guardian, and keeping house for him as his little daughter, has been verified long ago. Mr. Grewgious had chosen the sweetest little house in the most charming of neighbourhoods, and, assisted by Rosa, had furnished it to a miracle.

Among other necessary articles of furni-

ture, there is the nicest of old ladies who, in addition to being possessed of all the cardinal virtues, is stone-deaf. This is convenient, because they so often talk of Eddy in Egypt that, if she could hear, it might weary her. They wonder, in the evenings, whether he will ever pay them his promised visit. They wonder (Rosa, with rising tears in her eyes, which she wouldn't have her guardian see for the world) whether he thinks and talks of them as much as they do of him. They are sure he does not. Rosa is vehemently certain, he does not, and that it would be preposterous to think he did ; of course, he has more important and more interesting matters to occupy his attention.

They discuss the probability of his bringing a wife with him. Mr. Grewgious, screwing up his eyes in the endeavour to ascertain if that is really a tear on Rosa's eyelash, is doubtful about this, and shakes his head. Rosa shakes her head, too, but only in vigorous denial of his unspoken thought. Of course the dear fellow will marry, and what a welcome they will prepare for the new sister ! How dearly she will love her ! Rosa is conscious that her voice is unsteady, yet strives in vain to steady it. Mr. Grewgious thinks all women are enigmas, even his own little darling.

Rosa stirs the sluggish fire, addresses a few words to the deaf old lady on the sofa, who smiles and nods, although totally ignorant of their import, and they begin again to talk about his letters. What nice letters they were—simple, open-hearted, manly ! Nothing on earth would have induced Rosa to even hint that she thinks them a trifle cold, particularly that invariable ending, “Your affectionate brother, Edwin.”

She had bid him remain her brother, and now she is hurt, angry, mortified that he does her bidding. She had warned him to approach no nearer, and now her heart sinks low because he does not cast her warning to the wind. An enigma ? She and all her sex ? Yes, truly, not only to Mr. Grewgious, but to her own puzzled heart !

He is prospering in Egypt. They hear that, not from himself, but from other sources ; he has risen every year higher in his profession, has become the main-stay of the firm, has largely increased its sphere of action, and is respected and looked-up to on every hand.

He has proved himself a true, brave man to the backbone, and, in so far, fulfilled his promise of showing himself worthy of a woman’s love.

But he has given no sign. Not one.

Surely, surely, if it had been for love of her, he *would* not, and *could* not sign himself for five long years, "Your affectionate brother." That had been a passing dream, and he had awakened, in the distant land, to other hopes, and other desires.

Yet this reticence does not repulse, but draws her heart to him, as powerfully, as irresistibly as a magnet attracts iron. No passionate pleading could have gained her love as surely as this.

The deaf old lady, whose eyes have been fixed longingly on the clock for the last quarter of an hour, rises at the moment when the hands point to ten, kisses Rosebud for good-night, curtsies Mr. Grewgious a parting salute, and retires to bed.

Rosa throws her arms round her guardian's neck, rising on tiptoe to do it, rests her bright head one moment on his faithful breast, then kisses him a hundred times, and, taking her candle, follows the old lady's example. Mr. Grewgious, glorified by the kisses, remains behind with a radiant face.

Presently, still smiling, but thoughtful, too, he begins to softly pace up and down the pleasant room, filled with a hundred tokens of its sunbeam.

There, on a chair in the corner, lies a tiny glove, and, dangling by its ribbons, a broad-brimmed garden hat. On the work-table in

the bay window stands her work-basket still, filled to the brim and running over, with sewing for the poor children whom she has hunted up; and, on the floor, lies her thimble. The book in which she has been reading reposes on its face, where she threw it down, on hearing his well-known footstep, to run and meet him.

The piano is still open, with the notes upon it of the song which her sweet voice sang to him that evening. Little, heedless, careless thing! He must take her to task. Point out to her the beauty of order. Seriously take her to task.

He says he will, but he knows he will not. In his office reigns an order, complete and perfect. A scrap of paper in the wrong place, a bit of tape upon the floor, would worry him to death there. His clerks know him for an indulgent master in all other respects, but in this he is stiff-backed and hard as iron.

Yet here, in this room, he would not have it different. No room, swept and garnished, could be half as pleasant to him, as this one, all alive with her memory. Her pretty carelessness, her dainty disorder, is a thousand times sweeter to him than the most supreme carefulness of another.

And yet—and yet! He only has the trea-

sure entrusted to him, to guard it for the real owner, when he comes to claim it. He knows that ; he would not have it otherwise. He *would not* have it otherwise ! When its preciousness is most apparent to him, and he values it at its highest, he says that to himself with an unfaltering voice.

Many have coveted and stretched out eager hands to take it, but Mr. Right (as Mr. Grewgious says jokingly) was not among them. Till *he* comes, he will guard it. When *he* comes, he will give it up with a joyful heart, and be happy in the consciousness of having done his duty, and kept the treasure bright.

He has taken her with him to the opera, the theatre, and other places of amusement, in the winter ; hearing nothing of the music, seeing nothing of the acting, or the gay throng around, for delight in her delight ; and finding pleasure and joy enough in the sight of her brightening face.

He has taken her with him to the sea-side in the summer, or among the mountains, suffering martyrdom in boats, or upon the backs of stubborn mules, yet more than repaid, when her silvery laugh rang out clear and untroubled. To make her happy—he is happy to know it—his daily thought, his daily endeavour.

At last, he, too, goes to bed, treading softly not to disturb her slumbers, and troubled somewhat still with the fear, which his short-sighted eyes had not been able to settle definitely, that that had been a tear upon her eyelash.

But Rosa is not slumbering. Her candle is out, and her room dark and quiet, yet the thought of Eddy is with her in the solitude, and though her head rests upon the pillow, she is thinking of him still—wondering still, if those last foolish words of hers were understood by him: “Where East and West come together.” She would die of shame if she did feel sure that they were long forgotten. Why can she not forget him, as she has forgotten others? Is this *love*—this yearning longing to see him once more, touch him, hear his voice? If he should call her—only write, “Rosa, come,” she would—she knew she would—hasten on foot, if need be, to go to him at his bidding. But he does not want her any more; she has expected too much from him, and has lost all. Otherwise he would have given some sign all these long years. Oh, why has she learned to comprehend her own heart, too late! Oh, Eddy, Eddy, Eddy!

The last letter from Egypt had been written

a long time back, and even this comfort seems likely to be taken from her. As day after day goes by, and no news come, she tries to brace herself for a still further trial, and not even Mr. Grewgious guesses what the effort costs her. Her high courage rises to the cruel task of struggling against a passionate longing, and she will not yield an inch. Thousands of men and women live, and are happy without *that* love, and so will she.

One morning, when May is far advanced, and through the open windows, leading on to the lawn, sloping gently towards the river, came the heavy perfumes of the lilac and the jessamine, syringa and hawthorn, she is startled out of a little reverie by the entrance of a maid, announcing a visitor.

The old lady is snoozing peacefully on the sofa, dreaming, perhaps, of the days when she too was young, and Mr. Grewgious is absent at his office, in Staple Inn. Rosa bids the maid show the visitor into the room adjoining.

“A gentleman, Susan? Did he ask for me?”

“Yes, miss. For master, first; and when I said he was not at home, for Miss Bud.”

With the natural wish of a woman, old or young, to appear to the best possible advantage before a member of the opposite sex, Rosa, with innocent and unconscious coquetry,

smoothes her glossy hair, shakes out the folds of her simple muslin dress, and re-arranges the ribbon on her bosom; then, with a soft step, she opens the door of the next room—the sedate little mistress of the house—to welcome the visitor.

She catches a glimpse of a manly, tall, upright form, as yet unconscious of her presence, standing looking out into the pretty garden, and on the green soft lawn, dotted with flower beds, and shaded by trees, clothed in the first freshness of the summer. Perhaps, oh, perhaps, he is the bearer of news from Eddy!

He has heard her footfall, and turns to greet her. Her grave salute is arrested as she returns his look, her heart begins to beat rapidly, her cheeks pale, and she stands still, trembling. For, changed as he is once more, she knows her brother—more dearly loved than any brother—and she knows not his mission. Oh, Eddy, Eddy, Eddy!

Not one word issues from her trembling lips, and not one word from his. He is as strongly agitated as she. She sees how eagerly and anxiously he scans her face, how searchingly he tries to penetrate to her thoughts, if that be possible—sees it through her gathering tears. Then he opens his arms wide to receive her, and she goes into his

embrace, as a weary wanderer, long outcast in foreign lands, and sick with longing for the Fatherland, enters into his home.

They have been sitting together for a short time, silent with a rapturous silence more eloquent than any words, when Rosa at last, with a sigh of deep content, raises her head from its resting-place.

Through the open window come the sweet sounds and scents from the garden, beautiful with the untarnished brightness and glory of the spring. The insects hum, the birds twitter and sing, the water bubbles and murmurs, and all seem to the two within to be talking of nothing but love.

A little spaniel—Rosa's pet—comes barking into the room, full of indignation against the usurper; but even he cannot withstand the prevailing influence, grows amicable and friendly, and after sniffing round the stranger, crouches down satisfied at his feet. Rosa laughs as she pats him.

"Ah, poor Netta! Your nose is out of joint, my pet, but you must live and bear it." Then, glancing shyly at her lover: "How handsome you have grown, Eddy, dear!"

"Don't say that, my darling, or I must return the compliment, and if I once begin in that line, I'm afraid I shall never stop, and you wouldn't like it."

“No, don’t Eddy! But (nestling closer to him) I *am* glad that you like me.”

“And I am glad, my precious, so devoutly thankful, that you like me.”

“I *do* like you, Eddy.”

He stoops down to thank her, with a fervent kiss. As his eyes rest upon her lovely face, flushed with happiness, he records a solemn vow to devote his life to make her happy, and prove to her how he values her love.

“No, Eddy, dear. Love me as much as you can, for I am quite insatiable for that; but don’t spoil me or pet me too much. Scold me when I deserve it. Put me down when I forget my place. Help me to be good, for I am a poor weak erring little thing, and I want a strong hand to check and guide me. Be sure, Eddy, that I shall not love you one bit the less if your hand be firm as well as kind.”

For answer, he clasps her to his heart, and holds her there with a passionate pressure. His tears, forced from him by her sweet humility, fall upon her upturned face. Happy the man who may shed such tears as these!

They are silent for a space again. His heart is too full of fervent gratitude to speak. The long years of working and waiting appear as nothing when weighed against the supreme happiness of this moment.

“Eddy,” says Rosa, raising her face wistfully, “will you tell me something?”

“If I can, my own!”

“Did you ever try to guess, Eddy, who it was who saved me?”

“Saved you, Rosa?”

“Saved me from drowning, Eddy, when, but for him, I should have perished miserably. When, but for his noble self-forgetfulness, I should have died in the arms of—” She stops, shuddering.

“I have never tried to guess, my sweet.”

She looks at him eagerly and enquiringly, with a flush, almost of impatience, on her brow. His eyes sink beneath her searching gaze, not with shame, but with a proud delight.

“Because you knew, Eddy. Because I know you knew. Oh, tell me, tell me.”

“Darling, it was I.”

“I was sure of it,” she says, with a flushing face. “All the time I was ill I seemed to know it; yet when I regained my consciousness I thought (how could I think otherwise?) that it was a phantom of my own diseased imagination. When you were found, it came back to me again, with more certainty than ever, but I was ashamed to speak, because you were silent. Why were you silent, Eddy?”

“My darling, I would not have had you know *then* for all that earth could give me; no, not even to win you, yourself. I would not have advanced a claim upon you, or striven to purchase, as it were, the priceless blessing of your love, which, unspeakably as I longed for it, I could and would only accept as a free gift. I knew your generous heart, my Rosa! I feared a noble self-sacrifice. The thought that it might be *that*, and not love, would have been a source of misery. And, besides, it was purest accident, or rather the boundless mercy of God, which led me to the spot in time.”

“Oh, I love you, I love you, Eddy!”

He clasps her to his heart again. Then they sit silent once more, until he speaks at last, in answer to her questioning look.

“Yes, my precious! you have a right to know now, and you shall. I had long feared and watched, on your account, that miserable man. I tracked him on the road to Cloisterham, and followed him, dreading that his mission there portended danger to you. But he was fleet of foot than I, and distanced me. Nevertheless, I went on to the city, and meeting some whom I had known, and who regarded me, as I fancied, with suspicious looks, I grew alarmed on my own account, and, terrified at the thought of detection,

went down to the river, wandering along its bank until I was far away again. I thought of you, and of the times we had walked there together, and forgot time and all else in the bitter sorrow at the remembrance of how I had trifled with your affection. On my return, I heard a splash in the water, and a cry for help. I did not know whom I was going to save, when I sprang in, in obedience to the common dictates of humanity."

"My noble Eddy!" She can scarce say it through her tears.

"So you see, my bird! (he draws her closer to him as he speaks) that you have no reason to feel grateful to me at all, for I did not know that it was you. It was well I did not! for when I found out whose bright hair I was twining round my hand, when I saw your loved face, cold and still in the moonlight, though I strove hard to strike out for the shore, my feelings overcame me, and I lost consciousness. So it was Mr. Chrisparkle who saved you, and not I."

"He, too," she sobs, "and I am, am grateful to him; but for all your trying to pretend it wasn't, it was you also: and I am so glad to be alive—so glad to know, Eddy, what happiness really means—so glad to be able to give you back my life, until I die."

Mr. Grewgious misses the waiting little

figure at the door when he comes home, and is surprised to find himself only admitted by the maid, whose triumphant yet commiserating face "speaks volumes." But when he enters the drawing-room to look for her, he understands the cause. They are still sitting, hand in hand, together. For a moment a shadow, like a mist, blots them out from the old man's wistful gaze; then the sun of a pure, unselfish affection swallows it up, and he comes forward gently to lay his hands in blessing on the head of the son whom he has found, and the daughter (he sees it in her loving eyes) whom he will never lose, for Mr. Right has come at last, and All is right.

THE END.





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